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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

STEPHEN CRANE: IMPRESSIONIST AND IRONIST

by

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ABSTRACT

While Stephen Crane's fiction resists classification in single categories such as "naturalism" or "realism," this thesis maintains that the techniques of impressionism and irony are in large part responsible for the effectiveness of his art.

Chapter One presents a general discussion of impressionism, circumscribing its characteristics in painting and in literature in order to provide a basis for the evaluation of Crane's impressionist technique. In Chapter Two this technique is observed as it functions in <u>Maggie: A Girl of the Streets</u> and in <u>The Red Badge of Courage</u>, and the interrelation of Crane's impressionism and irony is suggested. Chapter Three further explores the nature of Crane's ironic vision, noting particularly the "absurdist" characteristics of his art in three of the mature works, "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky," "The Blue Hotel," and <u>The Monster</u>. In conclusion, Chapter Four examines "The Open Boat," in which a controlled balance of impressionism and irony produces a total aesthetic achievement of superb proportions.

Crane's fiction exposes a cosmic irony which reveals a world of unpredictable contradictions and a human nature characterized by illusory pride and limited awareness. It is his impressionist technique which provides a ready and effective means of expressing this ironic vision.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

At the threshold of the twentieth century, unique and enigmatic, stands Stephen Crane. Few writers of such a limited life span (born 1871, died 1900) have offered such rich hunting grounds for eager critics, for Crane's work reflects yet defies tradition, encourages yet frustrates source hunting. While European writers like Tolstoy, Flaubert, and Turgenev may initially have influenced Crane, and while Crane is certainly the forerunner of his countrymen Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and Sherwood Anderson, he remains a fascinatingly unique figure in the history of American literature. In many respects his work is strikingly modern, and yet at the same time the chief literary attitudes of the 'nineties are evident in most of Crane's stories. Indeed, Crane's relevance to such a variety of writers and traditions is in part explained by the nature of his cultural environment, a period of definite transition in ideas and techniques. Therefore a study of Crane's work presents a remarkable opportunity, an opportunity to examine the relationship between undoubtedly successful literary art and the various "isms" which have attempted to encompass and categorize it.

Since 1950 Crane has begun to receive some of the attention he has so long deserved. John Berryman's critical biography supplies many factual corrections and new insights which were unavailable to Thomas Beer, whose captivating study (1927) still provides, however, a fascinating glimpse of Crane from a unique perspective and from source

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materials which are now impossible to verify. Yet both studies, of course, are primarily concerned with the relation of Crane's short but extremely active life to his fiction. Berryman presents a valuable supplement to Beer but perhaps damages the ultimate stature of his biography by the Freudian emphasis in his last two chapters. Apart from some isolated but perceptive contemporary comments on Crane by H. G. Wells, Conrad, and a few others, intensive critical examination of Crane's fiction had not appeared until the middle of the century. Yet even with the great increase in Crane criticism in the past decade, the great majority of readers appear to approach Crane from particular established viewpoints, seeing him as a naturalist, a realist, a symbolist, or some combination of these categories. The very fact that Crane cannot be read successfully and consistently according to any set tradition demonstrates effectively the unique qualities of his art. Philosophically as well as stylistically and technically, Crane is elusive and enigmatic; one can hope only to observe carefully and honestly the attributes of Crane's work and then assess both their relation to various traditions and their intrinsic, organic qualities.

As an American writing in the 1890's, Crane was undoubtedly influenced by the fiction of James and Twain a decade earlier and by the presence of William Dean Howells. Richard Chase speaks highly of the importance of James, Howells, Twain, Norris, and Crane:

With the advent of these writers an era began which has not yet been superseded, and perhaps never will be--an era in which all the imaginative dimensions of the novel begin on the operational base of realism.[1]

In its most general sense, of course, realism implies simply a particular kind of literary representation, a particular interpretation of reality.

And too, the novel is realistic by definition if one adopts the distinction

between <u>novel</u> and <u>romance</u> which considers the latter to be "the tale of long

ago or the far away or the imaginatively improbable; whereas the <u>novel</u> was

bound by the facts of the natural world and the laws of probability."[2]

Clearly, realism must be thought of in more specific terms in order to

appreciate the theory of Howells and the practice of James and Twain.

During the decades following 1865 in the United States far-reaching changes

were occurring, changes in political outlook, industrialism, communications,

and scientific knowledge, and changes which played definite roles in the

drama of literary evolution. This is the period which has become known as

"realistic," the period in which realism in its more specific sense

dominates the literary scene.

In Howells' constant and dedicated battle for the recognition of

realism, several dominant principles are apparent. Reflected in his eager

appreciation of writers like Turgenev, Tolstoy, Hardy, and Zola is Howells'

concern with the truthful treatment of material, with fidelity to life as

it is, particularly in its ordinary and unspectacular aspects. While the

realism of Howells was itself generally more eager to treat truthfully

a selective and respectable material than the wide range of passion and of

evil which belongs in actuality, his influence on less restrained theorists

like Hamlin Garland opened the way to the naturalism of Norris and Dreiser

and the probing harshness of modern fiction, not to mention the indelicate

eye of Stephen Crane. Realism, then, in its reaction against the Romantic

novel and its emphasis on the commonplace, on the representation of life

in truth and detail, is an important aspect of Crane's fiction, though

Crane thrusts beyond the conventional limits as he does in virtually every

category one tries to put him in.

Naturalism is another slippery term which must be circumscribed before Crane's transcendence of it can be observed. Naturalism as particularly applied to the literary movement in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century France, England, and America refers to the portrayal of life in accordance with the philosophic theory of scientific determinism, as exemplified in the works of Zola. Emphasis in naturalistic novels is placed on the animal nature of man, the denial of free will, and on the forces of heredity and environment to explain man's actions. Norris, Dreiser, and Jack London in America exemplify the naturalistic novel, the wealth of documentary detail in a novel such as An American Tragedy illustrating the naturalistic technique. European novelists such as Balzac and Flaubert as well as Hardy in England show the use of elements of naturalism, as is also apparent in some of Crane's work, notably Maggie: A Girl of the Streets and The Red Badge of Courage. Yet to suggest as some do that Crane is a thorough-going naturalistic novelist and to read his fiction primarily in those terms is to deny a great measure of his complexity and vision. Nor will it do to say that Crane "used the devices of impressionism in producing naturalistic novels."[3] Crane's impressionism is far more complex than mere ornamentation of naturalistic novels. The technique and philosophy of naturalism are only a small part of his accomplishment; further ground must be covered before an adequate appreciation of Crane's talent can be claimed.

I have suggested that both realism and naturalism are terms which play a part in understanding Crane's fiction, but that neither as a categorical description can pretend to tell the whole truth about Crane.

A third term which is frequently used in association with Crane and particularly to describe his technique is impressionism. It is with Crane as impressionist that this thesis will be chiefly concerned, although the error of trying to fit Crane into a previously established category will hopefully be avoided by using the term only insofar as it contributes to an effective understanding of Crane's art. Emphasis should be made at the outset that Crane the impressionist is not to be understood simply as Crane the word-painter or even Crane the imagist; while these aspects of his style are factors in literary impressionism, the argument to be developed here will concentrate on the extent to which Crane's vision, his artistic methods, aims, and attitudes, are those of an impressionist. Impressionsim in the full sense in which Crane exploits it enables the careful artist-craftsman to manipulate his material from multiple perspectives and thus achieve subtleties of irony which emerge structurally through the technique. Therefore the study of Crane as an impressionist will necessarily involve an analysis of his philosophical outlook, a poetic vision which appears to be grounded in an awareness of the essential irrationality and absurdity of the human condition and which finds its natural expression through irony.

In order to come to a rigorous and yet versatile definition of impressionism, a look at the chief characteristics of impressionism in painting will prove helpful. The interpenetration of the arts can be traced through historical periods, ideas and techniques alike being reflected among poetry, music, and painting. Thus some of the primary causes of impressionism in painting may also have influenced literature, and certainly there are similarities of technique to be noted. That Crane is an impres-

sionist is hardly to be denied. That his impressionism is an integral

part of his art and that it contributes in large part to his "uniqueness,"

that elusive quality of genius for which the quest goes on, is the conten-

tion here.

Crane's sensibility is poetic, poetic and modern. In a general

sense, however, he shares in what Richard Chase calls "the American tradition."

Judging by our greatest novels, the American imagination, even when it
wishes to assuage and reconcile the contradictions of life, has not been
stirred by the possibility of catharsis or incarnation, by the tragic or
Christian possibility. It has been stirred, rather, by the aesthetic
possibilities of radical forms of alienation, contradiction, and disorder.[4]

Chase's comment is surely a clue to Crane's fiction, and is a partial

answer to those who try to see patterns of redemption and rebirth in

The Red Badge of Courage. Through the aesthetic technique of impressionism

and the structural and cosmic irony in Crane's work the dominant patterns

emerge, patterns which often approach "alienation, contradiction, and

disorder." Affirmation does appear in Crane, in the human values of courage,

brotherhood, and self-awareness, but only when the irony permits. To see

in Crane's imagery and impressionism a symbolic mode which follows the

tradition of Melville and Poe as some Crane critics do,[5] and to allow this

to lead to a reading of The Red Badge as a novel of Christian redemption

is surely to overlook the ironic implications which Crane's impressionism

demands. Although Crane is undoubtedly aware of the symbolic function of

images, the evidence for calling him a symbolist in the American symbolist

tradition is simply lacking. His is a different sensibility and his

techniques are of a different nature. Impressionism and irony remain the

key technical and structural tools used by Crane, and he is therefore a

unique and strangely powerful writer. Howells and Garland are more important

as theorists, Norris and Dreiser are more representative in terms of the

history of ideas. Crane is somewhere in between, difficult to pin down,

and constantly soft-pedalled in anthologies of American fiction and discussions

of the American novel. The amusing fact is that always in such critical

studies the few pages on Crane (squeezed in with "Norris and Naturalism"

or "Howells and Realism") tell us over and over how fresh and brilliant

Crane's work is. But little is said beyond this. Perhaps impressionism

as a literary technique, indeed, as a mode of awareness, needs a little more

attention.

Crane is obviously a transitional figure, exemplifying the movement

from realism through impressionism to expressionism and expressionistic

symbolism. Crane's poetic vision assumes proportions which give it dis-

tinctly modern ramifications. The cosmic irony in Crane, reinforced by

elements of naturalism, implies a poetic outlook which sees through to

the truth of human circumstances, even if those circumstances seem ultimately

to be absurd. Carl Van Doren speaks of Crane's modernity: "Crane's voice

was so individual that he did not come into the honor due him till another

age, when it became evident that he had spoken with the voice of a generation

later than his own."[8] Nor is this merely a modern view of Crane. Joseph

Conrad saw Crane's worth:

He had indeed a wonderful power of vision, which he applied to the things
of this earth and of our mortal humanity with a penetrating force that
seemed to reach, within life's appearances and forms, the very spirit of
life's truth.[9]

In the irony implicit in the impressionistic vision, in the "penetrating

force" with which Crane thrusts to the truth of human limitations and

irrationality, in the amoral and essentially objective presentation of impressions, he is fully modern. In the development of this argument, no attempt will be made to survey Crane's works; his worth is finally determined by six or seven short novels and stories, a few sketches, and a handful of poems which he preferred to call "lines". But these few will stand.

I

IMPRESSIONISM

The eclectic nature of Stephen Crane's fiction makes any attempt
to classify it seem limited and over-simplified. Indeed, not only is the
task of categorizing virtually impossible but a far more basic procedure,
that of assigning words themselves to works of art, rarely escapes the
dangers of ambiguity and generalizations. After all, what specific agree-
ment is there about the meaning of the oft-used adjective "poetic"?
Whatever else his aim, the critic of literature must constantly be
striving for reassessment, for reinterpretation and illumination which
will lead him beyond the strictures of cliché. Only in this perpetual
effort to redefine the terms of evaluation and further refine the language
of criticism will criticism retain its vitality and validity. Nevertheless,
in the search for definitive terms and refinements in meaning, common
usage cannot be ignored, for language itself is imperfect and certain
assumptions must be granted. Thus we assume very generally that the
novel is by its nature governed by certain characteristics. In moving
towards a specific understanding of the term "novel," one would be
furthest ahead by circumscribing the characteristics of fiction and
pressing inward to the essential meaning. In a similar manner a look at
the general characteristics of impressionism will serve to limit and
define that term.

Before this specific task is begun, however, a word about

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"technique" is necessary because impressionism in literature is primarily

thought of as a technique. Obviously in painting there are two prime aspects

to be considered, the subject which is being depicted and the form or

structure which provides the organization and representation of the subject

matter. Similarly in literature, the terms "content" and "form" are often

used to mark the distinction between the subject of the work of art and the

manner of its expression. One of the great strengths of modern criticism

is surely its awareness of the basic inseparability of these two factors.

The further point which needs stressing here concerns technique, for the

fallacy which has perpetuated the separation of form and content leads to

a similar over-simplification which sees technique as merely an attribute

of form. The first section of Mark Schorer's essay "Technique as Discovery"

will help to establish the sense in which the term "technique" is used in

this thesis. Schorer emphasizes the basic premise of modern criticism

that content is valid in terms of art only insofar as it is "achieved

content," content which has been formed into a work of art:

> The difference between content, or experience, and achieved content, or
> art, is technique.
> When we speak of technique, then, we speak of nearly everything.
> For technique is the means by which the writer's experience, which is his
> subject matter, compels him to attend to it; technique is the only means
> he has of discovering, exploring, developing his subject, of conveying
> its meaning, and, finally, of evaluating it. (67)

Clearly, technique is an integral part of a work of art; in fact, it is

its raison d'être.

In fiction, Schorer continues, techniques like the use of point

of view or the structuring of events are often seen as "artistic" means of

controlling the material which is already there, rather than as "the means

of exploring and defining the values in an area of experience which, for the first time <u>then</u>, are being given." Therefore he concludes by asking that technique in fiction be thought of in two respects particularly: "the uses to which language, as language, is put to express the quality of the experience in question; and the uses of point of view not only as a mode of dramatic delimitation, but more particularly, of thematic definition"(68). This distinction is of the utmost importance in a consideration of Stephen Crane's fiction for it is through technique in this larger sense that Crane's power exists. In examining Crane as an impressionist and ironist, this thesis is focussing attention on his techniques-- his use of language, structure, and point of view--and the interconnection of these with thematic concerns. The distinction between the experience, the subject matter, and the organization of it, the presentation, is still useful for purposes of clarity and will be observed, for example, in the discussion of impressionism in this chapter. The fundamental point is that in a consideration of a work of art as a work of art, technique is an essential and inseparable aspect.

The term impressionism developed in association with a number of French painters around 1860 - 1870. The historical and biographical details surrounding the French Impressionists are interesting in their own right but have no real place here. Nevertheless, impressionism as it is used to refer to painting may provide a helpful and specific set of characteristics with which to compare and contrast literary impressionism and ultimately, Crane. The argument over whether or not Crane was directly influenced by the French impressionist painters seems to me to be irrelevant here. Regardless of how Crane developed his technique, the

characteristics of impressionism in painting provide useful parallels. From the name itself one might suppose impressionism to be concerned with sense perception, with the effect of external impressions on the sense organs. One of the chief emphases in impressionism is on perceiving and rendering the visible world as it appears, as it is experienced according to a personal impression, rather than as it ought to appear as was the previous tendency in "romantic realism." In concentrating on this truth of vision, the appearance of the subject matter to the eye, the impressionist painter concerns himself with the medley of colors and tones which he sees before him, with impressions of light, speed, and movement. With this emphasis on colors and moving forms, impressionism depicts a shimmering, ephemeral external world and focusses only momentarily on any one aspect. In this way it attempts to present a representation of actual perception. The illumination of a particular moment out of a vague flux of experience will be seen to be an important aspect of impressionist technique.

Literary impressionism is less clearly defined, both historically and in its characteristics. The techniques of writers like James, Conrad, and Crane are difficult to describe, and compound terms are inevitably developed to seek to describe their fiction: romantic realism, impressionistic realism, symbolic realism, and the like. Perhaps a more rigorous under-standing of impressionism and its literary implications might aid in this description. Hamlin Garland in his manifesto <u>Crumbling Idols</u> voiced the challenge to liberate American writing from the conventions of past tradition and the provincialism of the middle class. While he concentrated his theory around the term "veritist," many of his views are applicable to Crane (indeed, likely influenced Crane directly) and offer important

comments on literary impressionism. In the essay entitled "Literary Prophecy" he remarks: "Impressionism, in its deeper sense, means the statement of one's own individual perception of life and nature, guided by devotion to truth"(50). In spite of the pervading optimism embodied in Garland's vision of constant progress towards an ideal existence, his emphases on the sincere expression of an artist's perception and on the frank devotion to truth link him with Crane.

Garland's specific views on impressionism itself will be noted later; the one other point of interest here is that both Garland and the earlier French Impressionists were advocating a break with tradition. Impressionism can, I suppose, be seen either as a revolutionary development which leads ultimately to the modern movement in art or as the dying remnants of a decadent nineteenth-century realism, depending on which bias one holds. The history of art is at least in part a history of convention and reaction, however, and impressionism is surely as much a reaction against the previous romantic realism as the post-impressionism of painters like Cezanne and Van Gogh is against impressionism itself. Indeed, the art historian Lionello Venturi stresses that impressionism brought color to a purity and scientific accuracy which allowed the modernists to proceed with their innovations. "Impressionism, of course," he says, "was a revolution in the way of feeling and seeing, which changed not only painting, but also sculpture, music, literature, and even criticism . . . ."[1] Certainly Garland advocated a revolutionary approach to writing, and certainly the 1890's stand now as a decade of transition and change. Crane's uniqueness and modernity are not simply functions of his relation to the development of impressionism, but impressionism is clearly

a factor in the overall effectiveness of Crane's technique.

The Impressionist Vision

Impressionism in painting is characterized primarily by its relation to perception. The great emphasis is on recording visual effects, impressions of the external world, and particularly in noting the effects of light, the blending of colors, and momentary impressions of movement. Therefore the impressionist is more concerned with visual effects than with specific subjects. Rather than attempting a factual representation of nature or a study of a subject as it ought to appear to the mind's preconceptions, the impressionist chooses natural environments, particularly landscapes, as subject matter and concentrates on the play of light, the effects of the sun on water, the shifting of clouds, and other unusual visual impressions which allow the expression of contrasting and vibrating tones and hues. An important contribution of impressionist painters like Manet and Monet was their experimentation with light and the realization that sunlight "unifies" color into colorless brilliance while conversely, pure color applied in blotches will be recomposed by the eye into a unified impression of light. Hence contrasts and interrelationships of color are extremely important to the impressionist.

A point which needs to be cleared up early with regard to "the impressionist vision" is the extent to which impressionism implies a serene and reverent approach to nature. A common way of approaching the impressionist painters (Renoir in particular would call forth this view) is to see nature for them as supremely beautiful, something to be approached with humility and contentment, and something to be passionately experienced and rendered as it appears.[2] While this judgement may apply to many of

the impressionist painters, it is hardly applicable to the impressionist

mode of awareness in general. Degas could scarcely be discussed in these

terms, and neither could Crane, for that matter. Part of the trouble here

arises from the restricted sense of the term "beauty," a sense which fails

to allow for the emphasis of Keats and others on the essential beauty of

artistic "truth." It also fails to admit the possibility of irony in the

technique of impressionism, a possibility which is exploited in the work

of Degas as well as in Crane.

A further characteristic of the impressionist movement is seen

in the representation of an illusory and ephemeral reality. Maurice

Serullaz comments on this aspect of impressionism:

This predilection for the fugitive, the evanescent, was to induce the
Impressionists to record the effects of smoke as it curls upwards and
lightly dissolves in the air, or the fog, engulfing every object, robbing
it, apparently, of all its substance, melting the forms of reality in
order to create the poetry of the vague and mysterious.[3]

Vagueness and evanescence are commonly associated with impressionism and

are certainly characteristic. Too much emphasis on this aspect, however,

gives a distorted picture of impressionist painting, for far from being

without substance and superficial, impressionism in its concern for the

ephemeral is aptly suited to express candid scenes or unusual poses and

often makes implicit comments on the nature of reality as well. Degas,

for example, gives us momentary glimpses of horse races, ballet rehearsals,

a woman before a mirror, and the overwhelming impressions are of transience,

the illusory nature of reality, and a truthful perception of mortality.

The artist appears detached and amoral. This characteristic of impressionism,

the interest in the capture of the fleeting moment, has important reper-

cussions in literary impressionism and in the technique of Crane.

Garland recognized the value of impressionism as an approach to writing. In his typical stress on "truthfulness to life" he saw the impressionist as in essence a "veritist," and in his essay "Impressionism" he discusses the similar principles of each:

They select some moment, some centre of interest. . . . This central object they work out with great care but all else fades away into subordinate blur of color, precisely as in life. . . . It will thus be seen that these men are veritists in the best sense of the word.[4]

In the same essay Garland also mentions the importance of the interplay of light and shade in impressionism as well as the use of "raw colors" by the painter. "He paints with nature's colors, -- red, blue, and yellow; and he places them fearlessly on the canvas side by side, leaving the eye to mix them, as in nature."(124)

Garland's concern with literary impressionism is only one of a number of important critical formulations which are of interest here. In the work of Conrad and James, for example, further implications and characteristics of the technique are developed. In the well-known "Preface" to The Nigger of the "Narcissus" Conrad asserts that the creative task is above all to make the reader see, to

snatch in a moment of courage, from the remorseless rush of time, a passing phase of life. . . , to hold up unquestioningly, without choice and without fear, the rescued fragment before all eyes in the light of a sincere mood. . . , to show its vibration, its color, its form; and through its movement, its form and its color, reveal the substance of its truth. . . .(x)

Conrad here makes particular mention of the "substance" which can be revealed through the impressionistic technique. Henry James also has significant comments to make on the extent to which fiction is an intensely perceived

"impression of life." In "The Art of Fiction" he speaks of the impressionist's vision as the

power to guess the unseen from the seen, to trace the implication of things, to judge the whole piece by the pattern, the condition of feeling life in general so completely that you are well on your way to knowing any particular corner of it. . . . (402)

In looking at life in this manner, the literary artist here

competes with his brother the painter in <u>his</u> attempt to render the look of things, the look that conveys their meaning, to catch the colour, the relief, the expression, the surface, the substance of the human spectacle. (403)

Again, as with Conrad, the emphasis is not simply on a rendering of surface impressions but on the substance which pervades at a deeper level. The basic connection between impressionist painting and the aims of literary impressionism should be apparent in such comments as these of Garland, Conrad, and James. Visual perception is a key feature; an impression of the physical world which attempts to be true to that perception is desired; an ephemeral and fleeting reality where the unseen must be guessed from the seen is often a typical aspect. A look at specific means in achieving impressionist art will help to consolidate matters.

The Impressionist Technique

Thus far the discussion of impressionism has focussed on matters involving the way the impressionist views the world, his subject matter, and similar points of general interest. A few important aspects of impressionism may more conveniently be discussed under the specific heading, technique, for they involve specific questions of methods and devices used to execute the impressionist vision. Preoccupation with the effects of

light and with the overall optical impression of a scene resulted in a
great concern with color by the impressionist painters. According to one
art critic, the "great original contribution of the nineteenth-century
impressionists lay in their full realization of our perception of color and
all its implications for the painter's art."[5] Pools of bright colors are
used in impressionist painting to achieve open-air effects, and a typical
impressionist technique is the application of the pigment in bold brush-
strokes of different pure colors rather than the mixture of the colors on
the palette. Therefore the total impression is formed by contrasts and
interrelationships between colors and the merging of them in the eye. In
this way, of course, a flickering and fleeting impression of experience
is preserved, much as the painter would perceive. As another commentator
mentions, "a color mixed and laid flat never looks as brilliant and alive
as spots or dashes of the original colors that made up the mixture, juxta-
posed on the canvas and merged by the retina of the eye at the right
distance."[6] In creating the impression of a green reflection in water,
for example, the impressionist would use a number of dabs of blue and
yellow. A later technique which developed is that of "pointillism" which
further refined this use of broken touches of color. The pointillist
covers the surface with small, juxtaposed touches of these elements to
approximate the varied colors in the impression.

An interesting corollary to the impressionist use of color emerges
in a consideration of the question of illusion in art. The extent to which
the artist relies on the beholder to "complete" the work of art (or even
uses the beholder as a functional entity) is an important concern in
impressionist painting and has significant literary ramifications. Obviously

if the impressionist technique consists in juxtaposing blobs of color on the canvas and counting on the optical mixture for the impression, the beholder's perception is a part of the experience. The artist, furthermore, has an implicit control over the response of the beholder; while appearing to render the external world objectively, he is in fact rendering his own subjective vision and demanding a subjective response from his onlooker. Thus the beholder is being drawn into the process of creation more directly than in realistic painting and is forced to search his own response for a complete experience. As art becomes increasingly expressionistic this power is intensified, for the emphasis falls more and more on emotional qualities and on the need for subjective structuring.

But how much of this "subjective structuring" does one find in impressionistic art? One of the great aims of the French Impressionists was to render as objectively as possible the external world as it impressed itself on their perception. Whether they acknowledged it or not, of course, an attempt to record visual impressions is necessarily subjective, being the artist's personal response to what he sees. And the beholder must also supply a subjective response, as Gombrich points out in his brilliant and delightful study, Art and Illusion:

It is the point of impressionist painting that the direction of the brushstroke is no longer an aid to the reading of forms. It is without any support from structure that the beholder must mobilize his memory of the visible world and project it into the mosaic of strokes and dabs on the canvas before him. . . . (169)

This point about lack of apparent structure gives rise to a common mis-conception about impressionism in general. The following typical state-ment may be true about some impressionist paintings but surely does not

apply to others or to impressionism in the broader sense in which it applies to literature: "Unity of light leaves something to be desired by way of structure, bulk, form. The Impressionists had gained color for posterity, but they had lost <u>organization</u>."[7] A chief concern of this thesis is to show that impressionism as Crane uses it is a structural device which operates with irony to form the basis of his technique. Therefore this question of structure in impressionistic art is highly significant.

The whole of Gombrich's book is directed at the problems of illusion, suggestion, and the projection of configurations and interpretations in response to art. As has been suggested, the impressionist particularly relies on his viewer's response to fill in the gaps. This is not to say, however, that a sense of form or structure is lacking, for the impressionist technique can itself be a structural tool. Both James and Conrad, we have seen, stress the underlying substance of impressionistic art, and James in particular speaks of the artist's power "to trace the implication of things. . . ." It is not sufficient simply to dismiss impressionism as an art which records surface coloration only. The literary ramifications of the impressionist's seeming "formlessness" will be discussed shortly, but first one or two examples from painting will further illustrate the potential significance of impressionism especially in the pictorial arts. The influence of Chinese and Japanese theory on the impressionists should not be overlooked. Chinese art emphasizes the power of expressing through the absence of detailed brushwork and drawing, requiring the beholder to project the expected image to complete the expression. Japanese color prints, as well as the influence of photography, focus   attention on unorthodox angles and unusual perspectives. The

sculpture of Rodin gives the impression of "becoming," of incompleteness,
and Degas' paintings reflect experimentation with the use of space and
with candid perspectives. Impressionism pushed beyond the conventional
perception of the realist painters, and hastened by the camera, continued
to experiment, as Serullac suggests:

> In point of fact the Impressionist painters found in photography a rival
> of their new vision of the world and were to try and seize in flight the
> fleeting moment, those brief and rapid movements which escape the limits
> of photographic snapshots and were to create half-discerned reality, a
> hitherto unsuspected world of fiction. (50)

Literary Implications

Speaking of Sherwood Anderson, C. C. Walcutt comments on impres-
sionism, asserting that it

> attempts to render the _quality_ of experience more closely, more colorfully,
> more delicately than it has been rendered. To this end it presents a
> mind _receiving_ impressions rather than judging, classifying, or speculating;
> and because it attempts to catch the experience as it is received, that
> experience will not have a reasonable order but a chronological or associa-
> tional one.[8]

Two points are of particular significance here. The impressionist technique
presents a mind which is essentially detached and amoral, "receiving
impressions," and the experience rendered will appear episodic in structure,
the record of fleeting moments illuminated out of a background of darkness
and flux. Furthermore, impressionism as a technique has implications about
the world it is reporting: it encourages, in fact stems from, the view
that reality is illusory, ideals and conventions are questionable, and the
world is complex, irrational, absurd. Rather than fortifying and idealizing
existence according to preconceived patterns of order and convention, the
impressionist technique breaks up such dimensions in order to express

experience in the truth of its non-logical appearance.

Through the points raised in this chapter a paradox becomes apparent. The impressionist artist has been described alternately as subjective in his personal rendering of what he perceives, and as objective, amoral, and detached. In the resolution of this apparent contradiction lies the secret of the technique of great art. All art is subjective in that it represents an individual's vision of reality, and impressionism no less so in its emphasis on perception. Yet if Conrad's assertion that the artist must above all make the reader see and feel (share in the experience) has any value, then obviously the artist's experience must be objectified to a certain extent. The greater the detachment and apparent objectivity of the artist, the more effective his depiction of experience, for the reader will feel more directly a witness to the scene. Thus the impressionist technique allows the writer to present his perceptions in what appears to be an uncontrived and raw form, immediate and momentary, without the mediation of structural calculations or plot formations. The modern dramatist Samuel Beckett says this of Marcel Proust: "By his impressionism I mean his non-logical statement of phenomena in the order and exactitude of their perception, before they have been distorted into intelligibility in order to be forced into a chain of cause and effect."[9] The artist also is able to mould his reader's perceptions unobtrusively because of his apparent absence. Juxtapositions of perspectives and points of view enable him to achieve contrasts and to undercut conventional illusions. Thus even the apparent amorality of the impressionist is not absolute for, like the satirist, he can direct his irony so that his own position is evident by implication. Yet as Henry James points out, we

"are discussing the Art of Fiction; questions of art are questions (in the widest sense) of execution; questions of morality are quite another affair. . . ."[10]

A question which will become increasingly relevant during this thesis is that of Crane's irony and its relation to the impressionist technique. In speaking of Crane as a "cosmic ironist" as I do periodically and as others have done, I mean to suggest the concern in Crane's work with man's place in the universe and his relation to existence itself. Thus it would seem relevant to observe Crane's fiction in terms of existentialist thought where applicable. Suggestion was made earlier of the implications within the impressionist technique of an illusory reality and a complex and irrational world. In Crane's fiction man is observed in such a world in varying positions of helplessness, defiance, and courage. The impressionist technique allows Crane to objectify his vision while he remains the detached observer. Ultimately, perhaps, impressionism can offer a dramatization of the poetic vision which Camus defines as the "absurd." The absurd exists in the irresolvable contradictions raised by human existence, in the clash between man's ideals, his nostalgia for order, and the inscrutable reality which he encounters and of which he is a part.

This world in itself is not reasonable, that is all that can be said. But what is absurd is the confrontation of this irrational and the wild longing for clarity whose call echoes in the human heart. The absurd depends as much on man as on the world.[11]

Impressionism in its fullest implications allows an expression of this confrontation.

Crane as Impressionist

This chapter has attempted to suggest in some detail the funda-

mental features of impressionism in painting, at the same time introducing

the key issues in literary impressionism. The implications of the impres-

sionist technique offer room for speculation, and the brief comments in

the preceding section foreshadow an aspect of my approach to Crane. But

little has been said yet of Crane's technique itself. To what extent can

Crane's writing be called impressionistic? How can this literary impres-

sionism be described, and what is the general relation of Crane's vision

to this technique? These are questions which concern the thesis as a whole,

but a general indication here of Crane's position will lead directly into

a detailed discussion of specific works.

In his series of impressions entitled "War Memories," Crane writes

of seeing a wounded soldier about to be operated on on the altar table of

a church which has been converted into a hospital:

The flash of the impression was like light, and for this instant it illu-
minated all the dark recesses of one's remotest ideas of sacrilege, ghastly
and wanton. I bring this to you merely as an effect, an effect of mental
light and shade, if you like; something done in thought similar to that
which the French impressionists do in colour; something meaningless and
at the same time overwhelming, crushing, monstrous.[12]

This is one of the few references Crane ever makes to impressionism as

such, but it draws attention to the kind of artistic effect which Crane

associates with the impressionists. The momentary illumination, the

"aesthetic" emphasis on the effect itself, the subtle but powerful sense

of a paradoxical meaningless meaning of the experience--these elements are

all key features in the impressionist technique which Crane displays in

his best stories. In spite of his reluctance to discuss influences on his

writing, Crane is evidently related to the impressionists by more than arbitrary connections.

Few comments on Crane's style fail to note the expressive use of color in his prose and the vigorous imaginativeness of his use of words. Language is, of course, the key tool at a writer's disposal and the ability to find the apt phrase, le mot juste, goes a long way towards making a great literary artist. Yet Crane's facility with language is particularly effective; he is called an impressionist in part because of his "word painting." Crane uses color frequently and dynamically, as the titles of many of his stories testify. Several personal recollections of the man emphasize his impressionism. Ralph Paine, who spent many hours of adventure with Crane in the West Indies, writes:

It was his business, as he viewed it, to gather impressions and write them as the spirit moved. . . . And as he went on, he used words as though they were colors to be laid on a canvas with a vigorous and daring brush.[13]

Thomas Beer tells of a time when Crane was hunting in the hills with his brother and stopped to ask, "'Will, isn't that cloud green? . . . But they wouldn't believe it if I put it in a book.'"[14] Elsewhere Beer stresses Crane's concentration on suggestion and impression in his description and characterization rather than on a detailed sense of shape or contour. (155) This aspect of his characterization will be discussed later, for the use of single-dimensional characters is a significant part of his technique.

H. G. Wells also knew Crane and made brief but perceptive comments on Crane's art. In particular he speaks of the connection between Crane's technique and the art of painting:

For the great influence of the studio on Crane cannot be ignored; in the persistent selection of the essential elements of an impression, in the ruthless exclusion of mere information, in the direct vigor with which the selected points are made, there is Whistler even more than there is Tolstoy in the Red Badge of Courage.[15]

Wells touches on a crucial point in his stress on Crane's ability to

select the proper materials for his art. Again the emphasis is on the

power of suggestion, the effect of imaginative vigor which results when

the audience is forced to take part in the experience. This is a distinc-

tive feature of impressionist writing and demonstrates a key difference

between a writer like Dreiser and Crane. In her introduction to Volume IX

of Crane's works Willa Cather shares Wells's view, stating that Crane

knew above all how to handle detail:

If he saw one thing in a landscape that thrilled him, he put it on paper, but he never tried to make a faithful report of everything else within his field of vision, as if he were a conscientious salesman making out his expense account. (x-xi)

The impressionist attempts to render life truthfully, according to his

vision, but the artist in him demands that he select, mould, and express

what he sees.

There are numerous examples throughout Crane's work of his

ability to create vivid and colorful effects with words; a more signi-

ficant aspect of his impressionism, however, is found in the very structure

of his fiction, in the episodic nature of the composition. Analogy might

be made to musical structure, but the visual arts remain closest to Crane's

technique. Parallels to Crane's writing may be found both in the impres-

sionist painter's vivid capture of momentary impressions and in the camera

techniques of juxtaposing points of view and focussing on particular

selective details. H. E. Bates in his study of the modern short story

comments on these aspects of Crane's technique:

Long before the motion-picture camera shot the Bowery or the cacti of
Mexico, Crane had shot them with an eye mounted on a swivel, so that his
stories are made up, like a film, of a series of selected illuminatory
shots, often of startling metaphorical vividness.[16]

Bates goes on to say that Crane's method is fully modern, the stories told

by "the implication of certain isolated incidents, by the capture and

significant arrangement of casual, episodic moments." This "significant

arrangement" and the ensuing "implication" are the means by which Crane

achieves some of his most subtle irony. R. W. Stallman also affirms the

structural importance of Crane's episodic technique and further stresses

the patterned integration of a Crane story:

His style is, in brief, prose pointillism. It is composed of disconnected
images which, like the blobs of color in a French Impressionist painting,
coalesce one with another, every word-group having a cross-reference
relationship, every seemingly disconnected detail having an interrelation-
ship to the configurated pattern of the whole. The intensity of a
Crane tale is due to this patterned coalescence of disconnected things,
everything at once fluid and precise.[17]

It is apparent from this variety of important critical opinion that recog-

nition of Crane as a superb impressionist is not lacking. What do seem

to be missing, though, are forthright attempts to examine the consequences

of this impressionism in terms of Crane's basic technique, in terms of the

total effectiveness of his art.

Justification for discussing impressionism in as radical a way

as I do in this thesis arises from three chief opinions. I believe first

that the concept of impressionism as necessarily reflecting a serene and

contented philosophy is wrong. Second, the modern movement in painting

seems to me to grow in large part out of impressionism, rather than to react completely against it. And Crane himself, thirdly, is surely both ironist in a modern way and impressionist in a painterly way, and to talk of an organically-unified technique demands a reconciliation of the two. Some mention has already been made of the folly of restricting impressionism to art of joy and well-being. Let it suffice here to reassert that impressionism as a technique is not defined merely by what the best-known French Impressionists did with it. Degas was in large part an impressionist, although the basic originality of his art distinguishes him, like Crane, from any definite school. He uses an impressionism that never obscures the form and he has a remarkable objectivity whereby he reflects the elements of life without romanticizing them or exaggerating them. Like Crane he is the observer, presenting life in its transience and absurdity and achieving irony through wry implication.

Stephen Crane's unique facility in fiction is surely a combination of his great awareness of the fundamental paradoxes of existence and his genius for expressing them in brilliantly defined limits--in chunks of experience welded into art. Alfred Kazin speaks of The Red Badge of Courage:

The foreground was a series of commonplaces; the background was cosmological. Crane had driven so quickly through to the central problem that everything else seemed accessory in its effect, but he was forced to describe emotions in terms of color because the pressure behind so wholly concentrated a force drove him to seek unexpected and more plastic sources of imagery.[18]

Crane's great achievement, an achievement of technique, is found in the fusion of his own vision, an awareness which is intimately connected with his sense of personal integrity and desire above all for sincerity, with a technical method which gives form to his vision. Impressionism provides

the tool. Crane's poetic vision is characterized by an intense awareness of the inscrutable and irrational nature of existence. Therefore the technique of impressionism, with its facility of focussing now here, now there on isolated aspects out of the total flux of experience, is expressly designed for presenting both specific detailed glimpses and overall views of a field of action. The constant shift in perspective, in point of view, allows Crane to manipulate his material and to achieve a built-in structural irony. Obviously, then, Crane's view of existence is marked by an intense realization of man's scope of vision, limited though that scope might be, and his fictional technique grows organically out of this fundamentally ironic vision.

FROM MAGGIE TO THE RED BADGE OF COURAGE

The impressionism of Stephen Crane is perhaps best thought of in three separate but mutually-dependent categories. Facility with language is an important part of any writer's technique, and Crane's use of words--his descriptive passages, his imagery, his aptness of phrase-- is an integral part of his impressionism. Structure is the second category under which Crane's impressionism may be considered, and the third is the irony which emerges from the technique as a whole.

I propose in this chapter to examine both Maggie: A Girl of the Streets and The Red Badge of Courage, in which Crane's impressionism is most striking, the earlier work in particular offering a good introduction to Crane's basic artistic method. In the third chapter I will consider more fully the thematic patterns of Crane's ironic vision, looking at two of his mature stories, "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky" and "The Blue Hotel," and briefly at the important but little-known novelette, The Monster. I will consider in the final chapter Crane's finest story, "The Open Boat," in which we find an aesthetic achievement of subtlety and control.

In the relatively early and somewhat clumsy Maggie Crane unfolds the key elements of his technique, and therefore a brief look at this naturalistic novelette will introduce many of the chief concerns which appear in the more mature works. In spite of its rather crude attempts

to duplicate the dialect of the Bowery and its too overt ironies, <u>Maggie</u> is an impressionistic composition which reflects most of the distinctive facets of Crane's writing which have been already introduced. The language, while lacking in subtlety and polish, is marked by frequent phrases of surprising vividness and by images of the kind which distinguish all of Crane's work. By means of a striking image, Crane characteristically defines the limits of the environments in his fiction. Thus near the beginning of <u>Maggie</u>, for example, we see this view from the Bowery: "Over on the island a worm of yellow convicts came from the shadow of a gray ominous building and crawled slowly along the river's bank."[1] The opening paragraph of the second chapter gives an equally vivid impression of the next area of focus, the apartment:

> Eventually they entered a dark region where, from a careering building, a dozen gruesome doorways gave up loads of babies to the street and gutter. A wind of early autumn raised yellow dust from cobbles and swirled it against a hundred windows. Long streamers of garments fluttered from fire-escapes. . . . Withered persons, in curious postures of submission to something, sat sucking pipes in obscure corners. A thousand odors of cooking food came forth to the street. The building quivered and creaked from the weight of humanity stamping about in its bowels. (141-142)

There is no attempt here to give a detailed and literal account of the scene by describing every attribute. Rather, a selective use of phrases and images creates an impression of the scene, an impression of its salient features and those aspects which strike the author as essential.

The bristling imagery of <u>The Red Badge of Courage</u> is remarkable, but in <u>Maggie</u> also there are frequent examples of the impressionistic use of language. Several might be cited to bear witness to Crane's prodigious and untutored talent with words--chapter openings like "The girl, Maggie, blossomed in a mud puddle" (V); or "On a corner a glass-fronted building

shed a yellow glare upon the pavements. The open mouth of a saloon called

seductively to passengers to enter and annihilate sorrow or create rage" (XI);

or the brilliantly vibrant picture of the orchestra hall: the "room rang

with the shrill voices of women bubbling over with drink laughter" and the

"smoke eddied and swirled like a shadowy river hurrying towards some unseen

falls" (XIV);--but the supreme instance of Crane's impressionistic use of

language is surely the chapter in which in little over two pages he sketches

firmly and with perfect control the ultimate downfall of Maggie. Having

spent the first sixteen chapters of the book's nineteen depicting the Bowery

environment, the gradual seduction of Maggie by Pete, her rejection by

her family and eventually by Pete, Crane risks a serious disproportion in

the action by compressing Maggie's slide towards suicide--is it one evening,

or several weeks?--into three pages. The effect is achieved through tech-

nique. With skillful control Crane sketches Maggie's journey towards the

river, a relentless decrescendo from the streets of wealth and theatres

where the "pavements became tossing seas of umbrellas" past a tall young

man in evening dress, past a business man, past a mocking young man in a

light overcoat, past a laborer, a young boy, a desolate drunk, into the area

of tall black factories, past "a ragged being with shifting, bloodshot

eyes and grimy hands."

She went into the blackness of the final block. The shutters of the tall
buildings were closed like grim lips. . . .
        At the feet of the tall buildings appeared the deathly black hue
of the river. Some hidden factory sent up a yellow glare, that lit for a
moment the waters lapping oilily against timbers. The varied sounds of
life, made joyous by distance and seeming unapproachableness, came faintly
and died away to a silence. (208-211)

The power of an episode such as this comes not from a wealth of accumulated facts but from the selection and careful phrasing of image and detail to achieve a captivating and imaginative effect, an impression.

Obviously much of the effectiveness of Maggie for readers today comes from its command of language, language which objectifies the writer's material with an imaginative vigor, giving stature to a story which might simply be pathetic, even banal. A further feature of this novelette (and a part of its impressionism) which prevents it from becoming mere melodrama is the detachment achieved by the author through the casual, episodic nature of its composition and the flat tone maintained throughout. The effect of the technique displayed in Maggie is the presentation of a series of impressionistic scenes, seemingly unrelated, which create a truthful picture of Bowery life by showing rather than preaching. Thus we move from scene to scene in Maggie in a somewhat jerky fashion, experiencing in close-up detail a fight in one episode and a panoramic description in the next. But the episodic nature of the book does not presuppose a lack of structural unity. The technique of juxtaposed episodes and moods which characterizes The Red Badge of Courage is being used with effectiveness here also. Parallels occur throughout Maggie as well to provide structural cohesion. At least three of the scenes are fights and three others are set in orchestra halls with Maggie and Pete on evenings out. Alternation of dramatic scenes and scenes of pictorial description maintains both the action and the environment, and alternation of moods, particularly Maggie's, provides the basis for the contradictions which give rise to the ironies. As R. W. Stallman points out, not logic but "mood defines the relationship between images and episodes. Moods of romantic

sentiment, illusion, or hope collapse in contradictory moods of futility, disillusionment, or despair."[2]

In turning finally to the relation of <u>Maggie: A Girl of the Streets</u> to Crane's ironic vision as it develops in the later stories, we find again in this early novelette the basic features of his art. The impressionist technique, manifesting itself in both language and structure, allows the objectification of the author's vision and the juxtaposition of contradictory moods and scenes to achieve irony. Thus Maggie vacillates between illusions of hope springing from her idealization of Pete and the hard reality confronted in her home environment. Crane is studying the effects of heredity and environment on the individual in typical naturalistic fashion, but he is also depicting a world of weak individuals where lack of self-awareness is evident and illusions dominate. Maggie sees in Pete a potential release from the strictures of circumstance. She "perceived that here was the ideal man. Her dim thoughts were often searching for far away lands where the little hills sing together in the morning. Under the trees of her dream-gardens there had always walked a lover" (159). Yet Maggie's ideals are thwarted and Pete's potential is seen to be hollow. She ends up in the river, and we last see Pete, drunk and ridiculous, being fleeced by women in a saloon. "The wine from an overturned glass dripped softly down on the blotches on the man's neck." (215) This is the Pete whom Maggie regarded as a "formidable man who disdained the strength of a world full of fists. Here was one who had contempt for brass-clothed power; one whose knuckles could ring defiantly against the granite of law. He was a knight" (161).

The final irony in this world of self-delusion and absurd contra-

diction comes in the last chapter. "In a room a woman sat at a table eating like a fat monk in a picture." (216) This is Maggie's mother, who to this point has shown nothing of understanding, forgiveness, or unselfishness towards Maggie, and who is now brought by the ever-present Greek chorus of neighbor women to the hysterical scream: "Oh yes, I'll fergive her! I'll fergive her!" (218)

While Maggie has weaknesses which might have been overcome with greater degrees of subtlety and control, Crane nevertheless introduces in this story the prime elements of his best fiction: an impressionistic use of language; an instinct for the tacit, for the selection of key images; a sense of the artistic detachment necessary to objectify a vision of a grotesque and contradictory world. Individual self-awareness as man's sole means of asserting his dignity is the underlying virtue in all Crane's fiction. In the ability to face reality and face himself man develops courage, the courage to interpret what is absurd and uninterpretable. Thematically and technically, then, Maggie is a forerunner of Crane's later fiction.

In The Red Badge of Courage Crane further develops his technique and achieves an unrivalled artistic exploration of the environment of war and its effects on the individual. Again the impressionistic technique is a key to this achievement. Written with the sense of immediacy and personal experience of a first-person narrative, The Red Badge is nevertheless carefully controlled by a detached and amoral presentation. As the experience the novel relates is flashed through Henry's consciousness to the reader, the psychological effect of the war-world on Henry Fleming is examined in intimate detail. Yet Crane the artist is invisibly present

moulding the whole into an aesthetic framework. Thus we are prevented

from identifying too directly with the hero, for he is seen from above

and assumes a representative, almost impersonal stature. The semi-natura-

listic basis of <u>The Red Badge of Courage</u> accentuates the impersonality of

Fleming, who appears at times as a pawn in the service of a cosmic war

machine. But here as always Crane is ambivalent; Fleming has a will, a

personal awareness of his situation, limited though it may be. <u>The Red</u>

<u>Badge</u> cannot be dismissed as naturalistic fiction; nor, on the other hand,

can it be resolved in terms of the mythic pattern of initiation, repentance,

and rebirth. Crane's irony is far too devastating to allow either a

wholly naturalistic or mythic reading.

A distinctive and dominant characteristic which pervades most

of Stephen Crane's work is the centering of his poetic vision in conflict

and contradiction, the conflicts of man against nature, illusions against

circumstance, individuals against society. In a world of conflict and

contradiction an ordinary condition of society is war, war being an aspect

of man's situation rather than a willed activity, and war becoming a

metaphor for life. Daniel G. Hoffman discusses Crane's treatment of war in

his study of Crane's poems, concluding that the prose provides ultimately

the more significant artistic form for this theme:

What flaws these longer poems of war is his attempt to make them too
ambitious, to generalize about moral conduct rather than, as in the prose,
to concentrate upon "a mere episode" and compel the moral principle to
develop in the reader's mind as the inevitable result of his scrutiny
of a particular action.[3]

What Hoffman admires in the fiction, then, is precisely the result of the

impressionist technique, the episodic and amoral presentation of experience.

One of Crane's oft-quoted remarks might be recalled here: "I go ahead, for I understand that a man is born into the world with his own pair of eyes, and he is not at all responsible for his vision--he is merely responsible for his quality of personal honesty. To keep close to this personal honesty is my supreme ambition."[4] In another letter he further stresses the detachment necessary for a writer: "I have been very careful not to let any theories or pet ideas of my own creep into my work. Preaching is fatal to art in literature. I try to give readers a slice out of life; and if there is any moral or lesson in it, I do not try to point it out. I let the reader find it out for himself."[5]

In expressing so often in his prose physical settings of conflict and confusion, Crane is surely testifying to his vision of existence in general. In a rare burst of solemnity in a letter to Nellie Crouse he hints at the basic discovery underlying The Red Badge of Courage:

When I speak of a battle I do not mean want, and those similar spectres. I mean myself and the inherent indolence and cowardice which is the lot of all men. . . . For the first time I saw the majestic forces which are arrayed against man's true success--not the world--the world is silly, changeable, any of it's [sic] decisions can be reversed--but man's own colossal impulses more strong than chains, and I perceived the fight was not going to be with the world but with myself.[6]

Here we are at the heart of The Red Badge, the problem of an individual struggle with cowardice, illusions, blindness. In his excellent introduction to the American Literary Masters edition of The Red Badge, Roy Male emphasizes precisely a chief aspect of Crane's fiction. In Crane's war-world "meaning has been replaced with incoherence, events occur in succession but not in cause-and-effect sequence, rational analysis is irrelevant, and moral responses do not occur" (225). The characters

tend toward anonymity and are marked by single-dimensional traits. How can an individual achieve courage and dignity in such an environment? By what standards is courage measured? To these questions Crane directs our attention; but not in so many words. Conrad too knows the secret, as in "Heart of Darkness" when he describes the French man-of-war shelling the shore:

In the empty immensity of earth, sky, and water, there she was, incomprehensible, firing into a continent. Pop, would go one of the six-inch guns; a small flame would dart and vanish, a little white smoke would disappear, a tiny projectile would give a feeble screech--and nothing happened. Nothing could happen. There was a touch of insanity in the proceeding, a sense of lugubrious drollery in the sight. . . .[7]

Inadvertently and by implication the heroic illusion of war is smashed. So in The Red Badge.

Crane's impressionistic technique in The Red Badge of Courage is evident both in his use of language and in his structural method. Skill in particularizing his experience in vivid phrases and images, the ability to transcend cliché and, as Conrad says, to make the reader see, is no small part of a great writer's talent. Nor is it a small part of Crane's impressionism, for much of The Red Badge's effectiveness is a result of colorful, imaginative description, description both of external action and of internal struggle. The capacity for finding the key phrase to render accurately an impression is one of Crane's distinctions.

The very opening of The Red Badge of Courage exemplifies Crane's facility with language. "The cold past reluctantly from the earth, and the retiring fogs revealed an army stretched out on the hills, resting." (I,21) The word "reluctantly" expresses a sense of foreboding and chill, and the

view of the army on the hill, stretched out like some great battle-beast, hints at the animal imagery which pervades the novel. Furthermore, Crane's use of color throughout The Red Badge is profuse. Not only are images of color used frequently for descriptive purposes, to give a panoramic impression of a scene, but there is also an extensive metaphoric basis to Crane's imagery. In connection with the French Impressionists' concern with the effects of light, a comment by Claudia Wogan on Crane's use of color is interesting: "It is perhaps noteworthy that the scenes which are visually presented as paintings, with color predominating, occur either in the early morning or early evening, in the time when light is passing to darkness or vice versa."[8] As well as simply noting the impressionist interest in light and color effects, one might consider the ambiguity usually associated with the dawn and twilight hours.[9] Through the youth's eyes, for example, we share the ambiguous mood of anticipation prior to the first taste of battle:

In the gloom before the break of day their uniforms glowed a deep purple hue. From across the river the red eyes were still peering. In the eastern sky there was a yellow patch like a rug laid for the feet of the coming sun; and against it black and patternlike, loomed the gigantic figure of the colonel on a gigantic horse. (37)

Here is an evening scene in which color again is used both to present an impression and to imply the ambiguity of Fleming's mood:

When another night came the columns, changed to purple streaks, filed across two pontoon bridges. A glaring fire wine-tinted the waters of the river. Its rays, shining upon the moving masses of troops, brought forth here and there sudden gleams of silver or gold. Upon the other shore a dark and mysterious range of hills was curved against the sky. The insect voices of the night sang solemnly. (46)

There is a further, more emblematic use of color in The Red Badge. The color red strides violently through the novel, proclaiming bloodshed, disorder, and battle. Yellow often suggests the harshness of reality as well as the decay of death, as in the scene of revelation in the forest-chapel when Henry's illusions, characterized by soft browns and greens in the "religious half light," are abruptly shattered by the staring corpse whose mouth was now an "appalling yellow" (83). A detailed discussion of the metaphoric use of color, particularly of the use of blue to suggest an exterior innocence and red to suggest a violent interior, may be found in J. T. Cox's article "The Imagery of The Red Badge of Courage." Yet Crane's use of color and description is primarily impressionistic, geared towards presenting an imaginative and authentic representation. Impressionistic images function thematically, to be sure, but by means of visual and emotional effects rather than extensive metaphoric patterns. To force symbolic reverberations upon striking impressionistic images such as the "red sun . . . pasted in the sky like a wafer" (98) is to ignore the overall nature of Crane's technique.[10] One of the chief emphases of this thesis is on Crane's impressionist technique as a means of breaking down conventional patterns of order and revealing the essential conflicts, cowardice, and ignorance which define our existence. To repeat, the impressionistic imagery which he employs functions more readily in a design of visual and emotional effects than in a design of meanings wrought by ordered symbolic patterns.

Other image patterns than color are evident in The Red Badge of Courage, notably animal images and machine references. The horrors and chaotic disorders of war are accentuated in both, the war regiments

frequently being described as great beasts, often serpents, and at other

times as uncontrollable machines. Henry is constantly aware of the peering

red eyes of the enemy across the river in the early chapters, and his own

regiment is "like one of those moving monsters wending with many feet."

The long black columns of the marching soldiers are "like two serpents

crawling from the cavern of the night" (38-39). In the heat of battle

the machine imagery asserts itself, in reference both to the army and to

the individual soldier who loses his individuality in the common effort:

"The regiment was like a firework that, once ignited, proceeds superior

to circumstances until its blazing vitality fades. It wheezed and banged

with a mighty power." Men are transformed in the battle environment. The

youth

was like a carpenter who has made many boxes, making still another box,
only there was furious haste in his movements . . . . He developed the
acute exasperation of a pestered animal, a well-meaning cow worried by
dogs . . . . Buried in the smoke of many rifles his anger was directed
not so much against the men who he knew were rushing toward him as against
the swirling battle phantoms which were choking him, stuffing their smoke
robes down his parched throat.

A cowardly soldier, driven by his superior, "went mechanically, dully, with

his animal-like eyes upon the officer" (64-67). Examples such as these

are profuse throughout the novel. The use of such vigorous, almost sur-

realistic imagery not only heightens the reader's vision of the action but

operates thematically as well. Chaotic, instinctual forces governed by

disorder and irrationality characterize the war world. In moments of

sharpest intensity the youth feels a "subtle battle-brotherhood," and

later we learn that in the midst of the frenzy there was "the delirium

that encounters despair and death, and is heedless to the odds. It is a

temporary but sublime absence of selfishness" (64, 160). Crane is exploring

the nature of courage--can courage have meaning in an atmosphere of con-

fusion, blindness, and incomprehensibility? As we shall see, this question

lies at the heart of The Red Badge, indeed, of all Crane's best fiction,

and exists because of the relentless irony which is never far removed.

Several times in the novel we learn that "they were become men again";

but are men only men when like animals or machines?

Indispensable to the impressionist technique is the method of

"incompleteness," the use of selective detail and images to convey the

impression of a whole scene or episode and, structurally, the use of

seemingly unrelated episodes by which the composition progresses. Crane's

acute attention to significant detail and keen perception of what to stress

and what to omit appear in scene after scene in The Red Badge. In the

descriptive passages alone he displays the impressionist's facility for

focussing on the crucial aspects, as throughout the final and desperate

battle of Chapter XXII:

The youth could see the two flags shaking with laughter amid the smoke
remnants . . . . The splitting crashes swept along the line until an
interminable roar was developed . . . . It was the whirring and thumping
of gigantic machinery . . . . On an incline over which a road wound he
saw wild and desperate rushes of men perpetually backward and forward in
riotous surges . . . . To and fro they swelled . . . . Once the youth
saw a spray of light forms go in hound-like leaps toward the waving blue
lines. There was much howling, and presently it went away with a vast
mouthful of prisoners. (182-183)

Elsewhere we find: "The bugles called to each other like brazen game-

cocks" (128); "The regiment bled extravagantly. Grunting bundles of

blue began to drop" (186); "The woods filtered men and the fields became

dotted" (104); ". . . his tongue lay dead in the tomb of his mouth" (99);

"There was much blood upon the grass blades" (192). What is everywhere notable is the originality of the expression, the careful selection of a key phrase to render the exact impression.

One last point needs to be mentioned with respect to Crane's use of selective detail and imagery. It is generally conceded that much of the power of The Red Badge derives from its psychological portrayal of an individual in battle, in battle within as well as on the battlefield. Crane's achievement in depicting Henry Fleming's inner turmoil is the more impressive when we realize that a near stream-of-consciousness technique is produced without employing a first-person narration. The narrator is omniscient and detached. A contemporary review of Crane by George Wyndham notes Crane's narrative control in mingling the liberty of the omniscient narrator and the first-person emotional reactions of an autobiography: "By this compromise he combines the strength and truth of a monodrama with the directness and colour of the best narrative prose."[11] The impressionist technique allows Crane to record Fleming's naked emotions--by describing from his point of view, by commenting implicitly through imagery and setting, and by careful juxtaposition of image, setting, and point of view to expose Henry's consciousness. During the youth's flight from the battle, for example, we see his thoughts as he runs and share his assurance that the wise thing to do is to flee. Passing an officer, he slinks near, thinking that perhaps the general, "unable to comprehend chaos, might call upon him for information. And he could tell him. He knew all concerning it. Of a surety the force was in a fix, and any fool could see that if they did not retreat while they had the opportunity--why--." But soon the news is out. "The youth cringed as if discovered in a crime. By heavens,

they had won after all!" (78-80) In these passages Henry's thoughts are prominent in the foreground, but always presented by Crane with varying degrees of directness. This pattern prevails throughout the novel; the ideas are communicated imperceptibly by selective glimpses of Henry's emotions, the setting, and the mood.

In shifting the focus from details of language to the episodic nature of the novel's construction, we turn to questions of structure and point of view. A structure which is based on episodic sections is really an expanded form of the selection of details noted above, for again the artist is choosing key elements out of a total perspective with which to convey an impression. Therefore the episodic structure, as in Maggie, is distinctly impressionistic, being the "objective" presentation of a series of events, of momentary happenings, each episode representing a particular perspective. The "invisible" position of perspective by the author is a built-in means of ironical contrast.

An interesting and not unfruitful method of approaching Crane's structural technique in The Red Badge is to imagine it in terms of the movie camera. Then one notes immediately the contrast throughout between panoramic scenes and scenes of dramatic action, as in the opening pages, the subtly-managed flashback in Chapter I, and many of the shifts in point of view. This would, indeed, be a confident step towards an analysis of Crane's impressionistic method. One would follow Henry into the privacy of his hut after the opening heraldic pronouncement by the tall soldier, listen to his apprehensive musings, follow his thoughts back to his farm home, observe his illusions about heroism and war, and continue to watch his growing unrest as the days pass without taste of battle. Then the

first flash of combat would be recorded as seen through Henry's inexperienced eyes, his perception of war as something far removed from his dreams of it. The chaos of the first battle would flood the screen, detailed glimpses of isolated scenes revealing its confusion and disorder. Following the youth, one would see his smug self-satisfaction after having successfully passed the test, only to find him almost immediately assailed by more fighting, fleeing with his ideals shattered, and eventually attempting to rationalize his damaged pride.

The scene changes abruptly and we are in the dense forest. Buttressed by the peaceful natural surroundings and by the instinctual flight of a squirrel which demonstrates to him the sensible laws of nature, Henry again feels confident. But again we see his illusions smashed as he encounters first, in close-up horror, the corpse in the "chapel," then the probing questions of the tattered soldier in the train of walking wounded, and finally the grotesque death throes of Jim Conklin. We continue to follow the vacillations within Henry as he deserts the dying tattered soldier, views the fighting from a distance, receives the head-wound from a comrade in a flurry of confused action, and finally, with the help of a cheery guide, finds his way back to the flickering red of his regiment's campfire. The patterns thus established in the first half of the novel continue in the second: the contradictions within Henry remain, now with the added dimension of the regiment accepting his false courage as genuine; battle action is equally vivid, and Fleming's role (along with Wilson's) becomes increasingly significant; the climax of the action occurs after the final battle, but actual resolution of the novel occurs only in the midst of ambiguity and irony. The structural framework, then, is one of initiation,

experience, and ostensible maturation. But a closer look at technique is necessary.

Few critics of Crane devote much attention to matters of technique, apart from isolated discussions of imagery or the overall structure of the action. Yet occasionally in the midst of discussions of other features of The Red Badge one finds perceptive suggestions about Crane's use of point of view. In Maxwell Geismar's otherwise unimpressive comments on Crane, for example, we find this comment:

The technical achievement of the Red Badge was the picture of war done absolutely from the inside. It was the fragmentary consciousness of impending battle from the common soldier's point of view, with no 'causes' for the action which he is to determine, no sense of direction on his part, no plan of action which he understands, not to mention the larger issues of the Civil War which are never touched upon in the entire novel.[12]

Geismar focusses attention on the fragmentary nature of Crane's novel, the sense of incompleteness which arises from its impressionism and, as well, the "aesthetic" concern with technique which reveals Crane's interest not in military history or even the success of one regiment, but in the narrower (and yet far broader) picture of an individual consciousness in an irrational world.

One of the most important features of Crane's technique is his ability to show us Fleming's point of view (which he does through much of the novel) and yet to refrain from moving right inside the character. There is always enough detachment to allow an objective analysis of the "hero." I touched on this point briefly above in discussing Crane's use of language to manipulate point of view, but more needs to be said with respect to his structural technique. Percy Lubbock spends some time discussing point of view in theory, and then comments on Flaubert's treat-

ment of Emma in <u>Madame Bovary</u>:

> He makes her subjective, places us so that we see through her eyes--yes;
> but he does so with an air of aloofness that forbids us ever to become
> entirely identified with her . . . . His irony gives him perfect freedom
> to supersede Emma's limited vision whenever he pleases, to abandon her
> manner of looking at the world, and pass immediately to his own more
> enlightened, more commanding height.[13]

Precisely so in <u>The Red Badge of Courage</u>. Frequently we are directly exposed

to Henry's emotions, as in the lull immediately after his first battle:

> So it was all over at last! The supreme trial had been passed.
> The red, formidable difficulties of war had been vanquished.
> He went into an ecstacy of self-satisfaction. He had the most
> delightful sensations of his life. Standing as if apart from himself, he
> viewed that last scene. He perceived that the man who had fought thus was
> magnificent.
> He felt that he was a fine fellow. (71)

There is no doubt here, as in most of the novel, what Henry's inner thoughts

are. Yet the air of aloofness which Lubbock cites is ever present, often

implied by the use of phrases like "felt that," "perceived that," "believed

that." At times, however, Crane's comments move outside of the range of

Henry's perception, as at the end of Chapter IX after the death of the tall

soldier:

> The youth turned with sudden, livid rage, toward the battle-field.
> He shook his fist. He seemed about to deliver a philippic.
> "Hell--"
> The red sun was pasted in the sky like a wafer. (98)

The youth's futile gestures have no effect on the implacable indifference

of nature.

Examples of Crane's narrative technique are abundantly evident,

but of more concern now are the implications of this technique. The whole

question of Crane's irony is a complex one, for there is indeed some

question in The Red Badge about Crane's own evaluation of Henry's conduct

and of his feelings about the "subtle battle-brotherhood." Certainly in

"The Open Boat" the intrinsic values of the experience are more pronounced;

yet to speculate about Crane's opinions is at best of minor assistance.

The only choice available is to examine carefully the technique of the novel,

observing the composite effect of Henry's violent changes in mood, the extent

to which he is deluded in his experiences, and finally, the extent to which

the author seems to allow values to remain free from the undermining of

irony. Ultimately one's reading of The Red Badge resolves itself into one

of two major approaches: that which sees the novel expressing and affirming

the initiation and maturation of a hero, or that which sees an essential

parody of such a movement and the novel as an exposure of the chaotic

horrors of war and the irrationality of man's existence in general. While

the latter approach seems to me to be the only acceptable reading, The Red

Badge of Courage is no mere naturalistic novel of brute instincts. Crane's

convictions are complex and ambiguous.

The Red Badge contains a large number of ironical incidents, such

as the central episode in which Henry receives his longed-for wound but

from one of his own comrades. Yet of more pertinence to the matter of

technique is Crane's use of irony as a principle of structure, as a means

by which the thematic ideas develop. The irony builds primarily on actions

and attitudes of Henry Fleming, presented to us vividly and directly by

the impressionistic method. Henry's movement through the war experience is

a process of vacillation, confusion, heroic illusions, and disarming

circumstances. The pattern is established in the opening chapter as we see

the contrast between Henry's idealism about the glories of war and his mother's quiet awareness of the reality of the situation: "He had, of course, dreamed of battles all his life--of vague and bloody conflicts that had thrilled him with their sweep and fire. In visions he had seen himself in many struggles . . . . But his mother had discouraged him. She had affected to look with some contempt upon the quality of his war ardor and patriotism." (24-25) Continually through the early chapters Crane impresses upon us the instability of Henry's attitudes, the contradictions which mark his character. Searching in vain for other comrades who might share his feelings of discomfort, the youth feels "alone in space"; he "was a mental outcast" (44). One of Crane's key ironies is here. Fleming moves from a position of isolation and fear to one of awareness and courage, but the movement is based on illusions and falsity.

Contrasting with Henry's original heroic ideals about war are his immediate impressions when actually faced with the prospect of fighting. The regiment suddenly becomes a fearful machine of "iron laws of tradition and law on four sides. He was in a moving box" (48). But after the first battle, of course, ludicrous pride takes over until that, in its turn, is shattered and Henry finally flees. George Snell sees little heroism in The Red Badge:

Fear, unashamed desire for self-preservation, and a complete lack of appetite for glory are the motivating factors in its protagonist's experience. He runs from war; there is absolutely nothing heroic in his make-up. He is a molecule caught up in a vast explosion, and his chief thought is how to save himself.[14]

Irony builds up as Henry withdraws into nature's traditional haven, the forest. Frightening the squirrel, he deludes himself about the sign

given to him, as he feels, by nature. Then the romantic ideal is shattered as he finds the reality of nature's law in the ants on the face of the corpse, the procession of wounded men, and finally, the death agony of the tall soldier. Juxtaposition of Henry's rationalizations, ludicrous pride, and self-pity with the harsh realities of a chaotic and war-wracked environment enables Crane time and time again to undermine the illusions of Fleming and, indeed, of man in general.

While many argue that Henry makes a mistake in running from battle, pays for his guilt through the fires of experience, and emerges a mature and humble man, again Crane's irony cautions against such a reading. Upon realizing that the falseness of his wound has passed undetected by his regiment, Henry again displays his old sense of pride and defiance, now in abrupt contrast to the new humility of Wilson, the previous "loud soldier." In a bitingly ironic passage, Crane comments on Fleming's achievement:

His self pride was now entirely restored. In the shade of its flourishing growth he stood with braced and self-confident legs, and since nothing could now be discovered he did not shrink from an encounter with the eyes of judges, and allowed no thoughts of his own to keep him from an attitude of manfulness. He had performed his mistakes in the dark, so he was still a man.

Having thus exposed his ethical position, the youth concludes:

A man with a full stomach and the respect of his fellows had no business to scold about anything that he might think to be wrong in the ways of the universe, or even with the ways of society. Let the unfortunates rail, the others may play marbles. (135-136)

To miss the irony here, as Bernard Weisberger appears to do, is not only to misread the whole novel, as I see it, but to attribute to Crane the condoning of an ethic which, one would expect, would go completely against his

principles. According to Weisberger, Crane is intimating that weakness, "if it goes unnoticed, makes no more of a ripple in society or the universe than unseen courage."[15] Above all Crane emphasizes individual integrity and personal sincerity, as is evident in his letters; furthermore, The Red Badge is expressly about the inward struggles of conscience in a typically-weak individual.

The undeniable irony in Crane's treatment of Henry's manhood here is surely present in the three or four other references to the process of maturing. In Chapter XVII Crane again treats the youth relentlessly. Henry displays defiance and righteous anger towards the enemy's pressure, feeling that he has earned the right to relax or to be "ably discussing the processes of war with other proved men." The contrast between Henry's foolish illusions and Wilson's realistic outlook is apparent in a short exchange:

He menaced the woods with a gesture. "If they keep chasing us, by Gawd, they'd better watch out. Can't stand too much."
        The friend twisted his head and made a calm reply. "If they keep on a-chasin' us they'll drive us all inteh th' river."

Fighting with the fervor of a barbarian, Fleming draws the astonished stares of his comrades. The heroic ideal is apparent in Henry's view of his actions:

He had been a tremendous figure, no doubt. By this struggle he had over-come obstacles which he had admitted to be mountains. They had fallen like paper peaks, and he was now what he called a hero. And he had not been aware of the process. He had slept and, awakening, found himself a knight.
(146-150)

Again Crane's irony undercuts Henry's illusions and parodies the conventional notions of heroism.

In the concluding paragraphs Crane shows Henry looking back over

his experiences. This is surely one of the most difficult areas of the
novel to interpret. Most critics find here, of course, the culmination of
Henry's developing manhood; he has "been to touch the great death" and is
now a man. Yet the consistently ironic treatment of Henry's manhood through-
out The Red Badge gives this final assertion a ring of self-delusion like
the others. This is essentially the argument of Walcutt, who sees Henry's
motives still grounded in vanity: "If there is any one point that has
been made it is that Henry has never been able to evaluate his conduct."[16]
Stanley Greenfield, however, argues persuasively that Crane's tone in these
last paragraphs is different from the ironic emphasis earlier in the novel
and that there is an obvious approval of Henry's new assurance.[17] Richard
Chase finds fault in Crane's "necessity for pointing a moral," an embarrass-
ment which "is plain enough in the vague and pretentious language of the
last five paragraphs . . . ."[18] Clearly this is an ambiguous passage which
may reveal a division in Crane's own attitude.

One can say without doubt, it seems to me, that The Red Badge of
Courage is central testimony to Crane's ironic vision. The detachment of
the author, the effective use of point of view for ironical contrast, the
juxtaposition of illusion and reality in Henry's experiences, the effect of
language to reinforce both the impressionistic technique and the author's
irony--all these are elements of Crane's technical achievement in the novel.
A final assessment of the novel's overall tonal balance, the degree of its
ultimate pessimism or affirmation, can only be suggested. The impressionist
technique removes the necessity for a final conclusion, the novel appearing
as a series of fragmentary episodes, a break into the flow of experience
at one point and an exit at another. This is a fundamental vehicle for

irony, for any ulterior philosophical framework will have to be discovered by the reader. But there are characteristics of Crane's world which we can notice. The war world, as a metaphor for life, proclaims chaos, confusion, and irrationality. It produces blind bestiality in the men who operate within its limited perspective, or it provokes self-delusion in those who attempt to rise above it. In Fleming we see both sides of human behavior, the trapped and insignificant pawn in a great indifferent machine and the self-deluded "knight" who "saw that the world was a world for him, though many discovered it to be made of oaths and walking-sticks" (200). This contrast in moods follows Henry throughout the book, but is our attitude entirely one of scorn? Crane's irony is many-faced: inasmuch as Henry is a representative figure in a cosmic situation, the irony becomes cosmic, directed not so much against Henry Fleming as against all men, against the human condition. More than bitter scorn, a sympathetic awareness of man's plight is born of this irony.

A recurrent aspect of Crane's ironic vision is the limited awareness of man, his basic cowardice and ignorance and his inability to grasp the essential nature of his condition--his existence. Fleming's moods vacillate according to his momentary well-being and there is little evidence of a developing and expanding consciousness of his situation. Therefore his final optimism in the last pages has a profound effect. Olov Fryckstedt comments on the deleted manuscript passage in which Henry "beheld that he was tiny but not inconsequent to the sun" (Omnibus, 369):

When Henry Fleming grounds his new assurance on these premises he illustrates movingly the pathos of man's situation. In an infinite universe governed by inexorable natural laws any faith in man's dignity or in nature's benevolence is absurd. This final picture of the youth moves us. To have constructed an optimistic faith on the basis of his experiences required a

considerable portion of blindness, to be sure. But this blindness, we feel, is part of the common human lot.[19]

We feel this vague sympathy because of Crane's tone, because of the latent ambiguity in <u>The Red Badge of Courage</u>. Both cowardice and courage have appeared as irrational emotions, yet is there not an element of dignity in the defiant acceptance of one's lot, as perhaps in the death of the tall soldier? Absurdity appears in the anticipation and in the consequences of experience, in attempts to explain the incomprehensible and order the irrational; dignity appears simply in man's affirmation of existence.

III

TOWARDS THE ABSURD

In the preceding chapter I examined in some detail the impressionistic technique of Stephen Crane and observed its contribution to the total achievement of <u>The Red Badge of Courage</u>. The fundamental interrelation of this impressionism with the essential features of Crane's art should now be apparent, although the remaining discussions will offer confirmation. Therefore attention may more fully be turned towards an exploration of Crane's mature vision, towards an analysis of the probing artistic consciousness which lies behind the technical achievement. A look at major thematic patterns in Crane's stories reveals a consistent interest in conflict situations, as I noted in writing about <u>The Red Badge</u>, and in resulting concerns with isolation, individual awareness, and self-identity. Furthermore, there is a frequent shift of focus in Crane from the individual level to the social level, for a society is composed of individuals and individual lack of awareness will lead to social narrowness. Thus in spite of the restricted environments and characterization of most of his works, the thematic implications carry far beyond the particular locale represented. It is primarily in terms of these thematic questions, then, that three of Crane's mature stories, "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky," "The Blue Hotel," and <u>The Monster</u>, will be discussed.

Speaking of the typical Crane character, W. B. Stein suggests the essential modernity of Crane's vision:

The incongruity between what he wishes reality to be and what it is
alienates him completely from the universe and his place in it. This
phenomenon of individual isolation, especially as it springs from the
absurdity of existence, has in recent times been the cornerstone of
existentialist philosophy. Crane, it seems, had intuited its disillusio-
ning presence in his culture long before.[1]

Part of my argument about both Maggie and The Red Badge dealt with this

very matter of the conflict between ideals and reality, and certainly the

isolation which springs from this lack of awareness is crucial in much of

Crane's fiction and poetry, particularly in "The Blue Hotel." Indeed, a

fundamental emphasis in the writings of Camus, especially when he is

defining the nature of what he calls "the absurd" and the absurd man,

concerns this very contradiction, the irreparable gulf between man's

expectations and the circumstances of his existence.

To follow up a little more closely for a moment Camus' remarks on

the absurd, one finds a recurrent argument. The absurd is "born of this

confrontation between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the

world"; it is "that divorce between the mind that desires and the world

that disappoints, my nostalgia for unity, this fragmented universe and the

contradiction that binds them together."[2] Of chief importance here is that

the absurd exists in the confrontation of these irreconcilable elements,

in the clash between human nostalgia, the desire for order, and the indif-

ference of an incomprehensible and irrational cosmos. Therefore the absurd

is grounded in paradox, existing only in the face-to-face confrontation

of irreconcilables. Notice also that there is no hostility towards this

vast irrational, the world. This is a condition of man's existence, not

some diabolical punishment. "The absurd depends as much on man," says

Camus, "as on the world" (16).

Then what about man in an absurd existence, or in an absurdist

work of art? By what virtues can man be defined in an absurd world? Man's

freedom, according to Camus, springs from awareness, from a realization of

the absurd paradox which defines his existence and from a knowledge of his

limitations. "Understanding the world for a man is reducing it to the

human, stamping it with his seal." (13) Furthermore, "all man has is his

lucidity and his definite knowledge of the walls surrounding him" (21).

The absurd man, then, is devoid of hope, living not for nostalgia but

in terms of "courage and reasoning." "The first teaches him to live <u>without</u>

<u>appeal</u> and to get along with what he has; the second informs him of his

limits." (49) And finally, there is no question of moral codes for the

absurd man, for "integrity has no need of rules" (49). In its total

emphasis on mortal consciousness, the absurd measures values by personal

awareness, which includes the ability to judge the consequences of actions.

In this hasty summary of Camus' absurdist reasoning several issues of

great significance to Crane's ironic vision will be apparent. To examine

Crane's fiction in the light of Camus' terms, we must look at the worlds

of Crane's stories for irrationality and indifference; at the conflicts,

both individual and social, for the clash of ideals and circumstances;

at the nature of the characters for awareness or self-delusion; and at

the implicit values, if any, which can be attributed to the author's view.

It must be emphasized that what I am suggesting is not intended

to be "an absurdist reading" of Crane but an attempt (to continue the

procedure established thus far) to circumscribe the elements of Crane's

fiction in order to define his technique and vision. Therefore the philo-

sophical frame of reference of Camus is referred to only as a means of

comparison, as a means of gauging Crane's modernity and as a way of expressing the central tensions in his work. The value of Stein's approach to Crane is hindered, it seems to me, by his apparent desire to press Crane into a mould which does not quite fit; while the absurdist element is evident in the patterns of Crane's work, it nevertheless must be tempered with the ambiguity which prevails in The Red Badge: awareness of the inscrutable and irrational nature of existence provokes sympathy and even humor as well as scorn, in the realization that what is being revealed is the human condition. Thus Crane's emphasis appears to fall on individual awareness and insight, on man's attempts, through personal courage and humility, to understand and interpret his situation. A key to his sensibility will be found in the tone of his writing (is the irony sympathetic or sardonic?) and thus we are back in the realm of technique. Stanley B. Greenfield is acute in perceiving the balance which Crane achieves through technique:

Crane manintains an aesthetic perspective on all the elements that contribute to man's destiny: circumstances, instinct, ethical motivation, ratiocination, chance; he refuses to guarantee validity to any of them. This balance between the deterministic and volitional views of life and between a sense of destiny and the haphazard workings of chance is, it seems to me, the secret of Crane's mature art . . . .[3]

In his refusal to guarantee validity to any particular element, Crane holds us in the midst of tension, ambiguity, and paradox--characteristics of modern art.

i

"The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky," one of Crane's most controlled stories, allows the usually latent humor of his irony to dominate in an

amusing tale of the Wild West, at the same time lightly touching on the chief themes of his fiction. The entire story pivots on the ironic reversal at the end. Scratchy Wilson, drunk and shooting up the town as is his custom, waits in front of the marshal's house to fight it out with the marshal gun for gun, as is his custom; but when the marshal appears around the corner not with his gun but with his new bride, as is not his custom, Wilson is shocked and deflated. As he went away, we learn, his feet "made funnel-shaped tracks in the heavy sand" (XII, 102). Irony of anticlimax concludes a story of the Wild West told in realistic detail and with the typical Crane facility for description.

But does "The Bride" strike deeper than this? What kind of environment do we meet; how are the characters portrayed; what contrasts or conflicts mark the story? In other words, how does "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky" fit in with Crane's more "serious" fiction? The technical achievement here, of course, is pure Crane, but we also encounter a particular locale in which the author examines man in his limitations, ignorance, and dependency upon predictable patterns of living. Man's characteristic of living within conventional patterns of behavior, according to various codes, is exploited by Crane with great effectiveness here and, as we shall see, in "The Blue Hotel." The whole story is built around the conventional western melodrama, the meeting of the town marshal and the outlaw, but Crane continuously undermines the conventions by sly ironic observations from his superior viewpoint and, of course, by the anticlimactic dénouement which completely derails the conventional plot. In this pattern of conventional or stylized order being broken down by the unexpected, we move towards Camus' definitions of the absurd.

A large part of the charm of "The Bride" comes, then, from its incongruity; from the tensions between the melodramatic setting and the real emotional conflict within the marshal, and in the reversal of the dénouement. A closer look at Crane's characters, however, will further accentuate the contradictions which lie at the root of the story. Jack Potter, marshal of Yellow Sky, has a duty to his town. Indeed, he is virtually defined by his established position, modelling his behavior on what is expected of him as marshal. In a sense, then, he exists in terms of a stylized code based on the expectations of others, a limited standard of order. A distinguishing characteristic of Potter is his naive lack of individuality, communicated to us by Crane's superb narrative control. One imagines Crane struggling to maintain the necessary detachment and to keep from over-playing his irony as he writes of Jack's thoughts and behavior on the train with his new bride. We see Potter and his new wife engrossed in one another, clumsily making small talk, and we also notice the amused chuckles of waiters and porters, the newlyweds oblivious to all. Yet the marshal is conscious of a vague unrest; there has been a disturbance of his social code.

Of course people in Yellow Sky married as it pleased them, in accordance with a general custom; but such was Potter's thought of his duty to his friends, or of their idea of his duty, or of an unspoken form which does not control men in these matters, that he felt he was heinous. He had committed an extraordinary crime. Face to face with this girl in San Antonio, and spurred by his sharp impulse, he had gone headlong over all the social hedges. (90)

Here the inner conflict of the individual is revealed; Potter lacks the sense of self-identity and awareness to transcend the limits of his situation, the code by which he is defined. Stein points out that while

the basic situation of the absurd is here, the bitter despair and frustration which enclose the existential "hero" would be out of place in the humorous and bizarre context of "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky." Therefore the absurd contradiction, the crux of the irony, occurs in an external form in the meeting of Potter and Wilson and in the gunman's reactions. (Stein, 185)

In the characterization of Scratchy Wilson man's limitations and narrow views are accentuated. Crane shows superb technical control in his portrayal of Scratchy, first describing the reactions of the townspeople as they prepare for the outlaw's onslaught. A loud and verbose drummer, a visitor in Yellow Sky, is telling stories to a group in the saloon, and his abrupt change of character at the news of Wilson's drunken approach reinforces our anticipations. The bartender adds in a whisper, "'this here Scratchy Wilson is a wonder with a gun--a perfect wonder; and when he goes on the war-trail, we hunt our holes, naturally . . . . He's a terror when he's drunk'" (96). Yet when this ferocious and dangerous character comes into sight, we learn (casually and through the narrator's unobtrusive observations) that he wears a "maroon-coloured flannel shirt, which had been purchased for purposes of decoration, and made principally by some Jewish woman on the East Side of New York . . . ," and further that "his boots had red tops with gilded imprints, of the kind beloved in winter by little sledding boys on the hillsides of New England" (97). Crane's narrative presence is felt just enough to give a degree of objectivity, so that we see Wilson as a fearsome gunman but also as a rather awkward, childish man.

The chief contrast which Crane uses to achieve irony in "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky" is between the large, impressive, and fearsome

on the one hand and the small, ridiculous, and shameful on the other.

Note, for example, the minute details which Crane selects to give his

impression of Scratchy:

The man's face flamed in a rage begot of whiskey. His eyes, rolling, and
yet keen for ambush, hunted the still doorways and windows. He walked with
the creeping movement of the midnight cat. As it occured to him, he roared
menacing information. The long revolvers in his hands were as easy as
straws; they were moved with an electric swiftness. The little fingers of
each hand played sometimes in a musician's way. Plain from the low collar
of the shirt, the cords of his neck straightened and sank, straightened
and sank, as passion moved him. The only sounds were his terrible invita-
tions. The calm adobes preserved their demeanour at the passing of this
small thing in the middle of the street. (97-98)

The impressionist's technique of focussing on selective detail is evident

here; the curious association of a western gun-fighter with musician's

fingers and the ludicrous precision in the description of the cords of

his neck subtly prepare for the ironical contrast of the last sentence.

We move from Scratchy's flaming face to his gait, his revolvers, his neck,

and finally to "the small thing in the middle of the street" confronted by

impassive and unflinching doorways. This contrast between the man's

apparent greatness and his insignificance from another point of view is

also mirrored in Crane's description further on. Having proceeded unhindered

through the town shooting at dogs, bits of paper, and windows, Scratchy,

Crane says, "was playing with this town; it was a toy for him." But the

town is also described as an imperturbable foe; Potter's house

regarded him as might a great stone god . . . . Presently there came the
spectacle of a man churning himself into deepest rage over the immobility
of a house. He fumed at it as the winter wind attacks a prairie cabin
in the North. To the distance there should have gone the sound of a
tumult like the fighting of two hundred Mexicans. As necessity bade him,
he paused for breath or to reload his revolvers. (99)

The final ironical contradiction of "The Bride" comes, of course, in the defeat of this conventional badman by his confrontation with the marshal's new marriage, a confrontation with a foreign condition which completely disarms him. This abrupt change from the norm, this sudden unexpectedness, climaxes the absurd contradictions which have preceded. In the confrontation of an incomprehensible reality and man's restricted sense of order the absurdity of existence is revealed. The closing image caps the story's movement: "His feet made funnel-shaped tracks in the heavy sand" and, incidentally, encloses it in the framework of contrasts between the great and the trivial that have already been suggested. The epic-like opening sentences of "The Bride" describe the great expansiveness of Texas as seen from the plush seats of the Pullman, in contrast to the "funnel-shaped tracks" of indignity and deflation at the end. Crane's achievement in "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky" is one of technical control, devastating but humorous irony, and a tone of sympathetic amusement in the revelation of man's follies and limitations. In "The Blue Hotel" he is less amused.

ii

It becomes increasingly evident as one moves through Crane's best fiction that there are major themes and techniques which characterize all his work; the stories differ one from another largely in the author's approach--in the particular emphases he makes and in his tone. "Tone" in fiction is a rather indistinct quality, one which is difficult to isolate and discuss, but nevertheless it is an important element in a story and helps to define the author's point of view. Therefore while all of Crane's major works deal with themes involving individual awareness and self-

identity, isolation, fear, and self-delusion, "The Bride Comes to Yellow
Sky" chuckles at man's follies, "The Blue Hotel" is grotesque and sardonic,
The Monster implies a satiric social criticism, and "The Open Boat" displays
a tone of quiet sympathy. "The Blue Hotel" is a complex statement of Crane's
vision which takes a particularly severe look at man's pretentiousness
and his lack of understanding of himself or of his fellows.

Beginning with a description of the Palace Hotel, Crane tells us
that it stands out in the landscape with a remarkable vividness, having
been painted a light blue like the "shade that is on the legs of a kind
of heron, causing the bird to declare its position against any landscape" (X,93).
While it is surely a distortion of Crane to see a symbolic function of
images in this story in the way that Cox does,[4] nevertheless one senses
in this opening description of the hotel a subtle use of language which
carries meaning beyond mere description. So, indeed, we find that the
description of the hotel as a "screaming and howling" dynamo in the midst
of a "gray swampish hush" functions along with the heron image to launch
the major themes of the story: man's remarkable conceit and the horror of
his resulting isolation.

Pat Scully painted his hotel blue, Crane tells us, to catch the
eyes of all who pass through Fort Romper and, if possible, to catch their
business. The boisterous hospitality of Scully, based, as we learn, on
an overweening sense of his own importance, is mirrored perhaps in the
busy little stove which occupies the hotel's front room. The room "seemed
to be merely a proper temple for an enormous stove, which, in the centre,
was humming with godlike violence" (94). Whatever else it may suggest,
the picture of this throbbing stove in the centre of the hotel surely

fortifies our impression of Scully, who is obsessed by his role as host and officiously bestows his benevolence in all directions. In Scully, then, Crane presents us with the first of several individuals, all of whom conform to restricted codes of behavior and all of whom are bound by ignorance and limited degrees of awareness. Scully's behavior is dominated by self-concern, concern for his reputation as hotel-proprietor and pride in his town and in his family. The whole world revolves around himself and his restricted environment, just as the blue hotel is alone and all-important in its environment. Righteous anger fills Scully when he learns of the Swede's fear: "This is my house. You are under my roof, and I will not allow any peaceable man to be troubled here" (101). That his motives are centred on his own concerns rather than towards understanding the Swede's problem is made only too clear as he makes three attempts upstairs to solace and placate his guest. First Scully boasts about the progress of his town: "Why, man, we're goin' to have a line of ilictric street-cars in this town next spring" (103). Unable to sway the Swede from his fear, Scully then hustles him across the hall to see "a ridiculous photograph" of his deceased daughter, and having boasted about his family, he brings out a bottle of whiskey in a final and successful attempt to change his guest's mood. Scully then humors the Swede in the latter's new confidence and riotousness, and not until the Swede's accusation of cheating do we see Scully's true attitude. Throwing off his previous pretence of hospitality, he proclaims: "I've stood this damned Swede till I'm sick. We'll let them fight" (115).

If Scully's behavior mirrors self-importance and personal pride, the other three who share the hotel with the Swede are no less egocentric

and narrow in their attitudes. Johnnie in particular shows a lack of emotional control from the outset, impudence and impatience marking his behavior. He, like the others, makes no attempt to dispel the Swede's irrational fear by trying to understand him; rather, his actions seem geared towards provoking the curious stranger. The fact that he does cheat and then defiantly refuses to admit it implicates him directly in the web of circumstances. The cowboy is clearly the most limited in his awareness, except for the Swede himself. Possessed by a primitive sense of self-importance, he is, Crane tells us, "a board-whacker." "Each time that he held superior cards, he whanged them, one by one, with exceeding force, down upon the improvised table, and took the tricks with a glowing air of prowess and pride that sent thrills of indignation into the hearts of his opponents. A game with a board-whacker in it is sure to become intense." (97-98) Significantly enough, at the height of his new and false self-confidence later on, the Swede becomes a board-whacker. A game with all these individuals of limited vision and personal pride in it is bound to be defined by conflict and rootless fear.

The cowboy's crude self-importance in the midst of his ignorance is particularly noticeable as he continues to refer to the Swede as "some kind of a Dutchman" (106), but the key example of his blindness comes at the end of the story as he replies in injured terms to the Easterner's charge that they were all at fault: "'Well, I didn't do anythin', did I?'" (132). Precisely, we add, for in his failure to attempt to understand the situation he too is partially responsible. But what about the Easterner, who pronounces this moral assignment of responsibility at the end? Is he a victim of self-delusion as well, or does he exhibit a heightened perception which allows him to attain a position of tragic

insight, perhaps raising "The Blue Hotel" to the level of tragedy? Walter Sutton, in his article "Pity and Fear in 'The Blue Hotel,'" sees the Easterner as a key to the story's tragedy:

The correspondent's sense of man's isolation in nature gives rise, through comprehension and identification with others, to a feeling of pity which enables him to take a tragic view of the fight and to regard the preparations for it as "a tragedy greater than the tragedy of action," a perspective which properly locates the realm of tragic value in the subjective consciousness of the comprehending and sympathetic participant and observer. (75)

But does the "correspondent" indeed achieve such a degree of awareness and pity? He does, to be sure, display a sense of perspective which the others lack, being able first to perceive that the Swede's irrational fear stems from his reading of dime novels and then to grasp a deeper tragedy in the incident of the fight than in the action itself. It is through the Easterner's eyes also that we see the Swede in "a splendour of isolation," a "mysterious and lonely figure, waiting" (119). Yet this quiet and reserved Easterner, for all his seeming perception and pity, lacks that peculiar quality of selfhood that is indeed conspicuous by its absence in "The Blue Hotel," that mixture of humility, moral courage, and self-awareness that distinguishes but a few. In his failure to support the Swede's charge against Johnnie when he knew it to be true, the Easterner is guilty of a restraint which approaches cowardice. Furthermore, in his attempt to pronounce a moral resolution for this complicated and irrational situation, the Easterner appears somewhat deluded and shallow in his judgement, in spite of the partial truth of what he says.

All these characters, then, are limited in their perception and understanding and contribute to the general atmosphere in "The Blue Hotel" of disorder, contradictory emotions, misunderstanding, and pretence. The

restricted vision and self-absorption of the characters isolate them in a sense from each other and from a full awareness of their situations. This is the larger pattern which is revealed through the central figure of the Swede and the pattern which conveys the basic irrationality and absurdity of "The Blue Hotel" situation. The theme which we have traced thus far, the lack of awareness and responsibility in the individuals, is most apparent in the figure of the Swede, of course, and leads to another pattern which I want to be concerned with, that of isolation. The Swede from the start is strange, exhibiting an irrational fear which seems to be based, as the Easterner points out, on a stylized and conventionalized view of the "Wild West." His uneasiness and fear are evident in his frequent shrill laughs and silly remarks. At dinner, "with a laugh and a wink, he said that some of these Western communities were very dangerous; and after this statement he straightened his legs under the table, tilted his head, and laughed again, loudly." The others "looked at him wondering and in silence" (96).

But the Swede appears even more foolish after his session with Scully upstairs when he takes a few drinks and abruptly changes from the nervous, apprehensive stranger to a boisterous and loudly-pretentious fool. The movement of the story becomes apparent: with the Swede's with-drawal into his own world of illusory power and courage his isolation becomes more and more pronounced. A central irony of "The Blue Hotel" resides in the fact that the Swede at the beginning fears that he is isolated and to be murdered, and then actually meets that end under the illusion that he is in control and free of any threat. His pride gathers in intensity with the storm as he revels in his individuality and prowess. When he reaches the saloon after tacking "across the face of the storm"

the bartender comments on the bad weather, but the Swede asserts arrogantly: "I like this weather. I like it. It suits me" (124-125). The pattern that is suggested, then, is one of a growing isolation which stems both from individual blindness to one's relation to existence and from pretence and self-concern which wall one off from the human community. The Swede becomes personally isolated in his restricted vision and irrational fear, and socially alienated in his extreme conceit and self-assurance.

This theme of isolation is a major aspect of Crane's vision, both in its individual and in its social ramifications. It is a distinctly modern problem, for the twentieth century faces man with his own stupidity and insignificance in an indifferent and irrational cosmos. A closer look at the movement toward isolation in the Swede will carry us towards the meaning of "The Blue Hotel." The first overt reference to the profound isolation which is rapidly gripping the Swede comes from the Easterner, a man who himself finds a chilling undercurrent of horror in the whole stream of events. Through his eyes we view the fight with an added dimension of meaning, for he is a man with insight enough to perceive the absurd contradictions which lie at the base of man's conflicts and yet he is coward enough to contribute to those contradictions. The Swede pauses at the end of the fight. "There was a splendour of isolation in his situation at this time which the Easterner felt once when, lifting his eyes from the man on the ground, he beheld that mysterious and lonely figure, waiting." (119) The Easterner clearly gains a glimpse of the meaning of this isolation, and Crane, again through the subtle use of language and point of view, hints at this insight:

The Easterner was startled to find that they were out in a wind that seemed to come direct from the shadowed arctic floes. He heard again the wail of the snow as it was flung to its grave in the south. He knew now that all this time the cold had been sinking into him deeper and deeper, and he wondered that he had not perished. . . . The Easterner rushed to the stove. He was so profoundly chilled that he almost dared to embrace the glowing iron. (120)

In Section VIII we see the Swede at the height of his isolation as he moves against the storm, "following a line of little naked, gasping trees . . . ," in an attempt to find a road. For one caustic paragraph the narrator's point of view emerges, as Crane comments on the Swede's plight:

He might have been in a deserted village. We picture the world as thick with conquering and elate humanity, but here, with the bugles of the tempest pealing, it was hard to imagine a peopled earth. One viewed the existence of man then as a marvel, and conceded a glamour of wonder to these lice which were caused to cling to a whirling, fire-smitten, ice-locked, disease-stricken, space-lost bulb. The conceit of man was explained by this storm to be the very engine of life. One was a coxcomb not to die in it. (124)

Clearly this passage is highly significant and must be carefully considered in an attempt to approach the meaning of "The Blue Hotel." Several points are apparent. First, of course, the Swede has demonstrated his ignorance and foolish conceit and has arrived at the position of proud isolation which defines many Crane characters. The image of him tacking across the storm suggests an "Open Boat" situation of cosmic proportions. Furthermore, Crane carefully controls the function of the natural environment throughout, and at this point the storm has reached a fierce intensity and drives home in a graphic way the swirling indifference of the universe to man's hopes and illusions; indeed, the tempest accentuates the Swede's isolation but reinforces his sense of illusory confidence.

The narrator's comments in this passage imply a wonder both at

the ability of man to exist in a chaotic and fearsome world and at man's
tremendous conceit which is "the very engine of life" and seems to be an
essential feature of his nature. In this reference to man's conceit lying
at the centre of his being we are led back to the stove in the hotel which
hums "with godlike violence" and reflects the self-importance of its owner.
Crane is obviously suggesting that whatever else distinguishes him, man
is characterized by an illusory sense of his own importance and this forms
the basis of his existence in an absurd universe. While this conceit of
man is the epitome of self-delusion and the cause of his ultimate isolation,
as we see in the Swede, it is nevertheless the "very engine of life" and
a necessary aspect of the human condition. Therefore in assessing the
ultimate meaning of "The Blue Hotel" we find that the characteristic Crane
ambiguity is present. The final meaning will emerge only in terms of a
dual emphasis: the attack on man's pride and lack of awareness and the
realization that human existence is by its nature complex and uninterpre-
table.

This brings us to a central critical problem regarding "The Blue
Hotel." Two approaches can be taken, as Donald B. Gibson[5] points out:
that which sees men's wills as unable to control their destinies, or that
which sees all the characters as guilty, each having a will and responsi-
bility, and hence a sort of brotherhood of man. Those few critics[6] who
attempt to resolve Crane's vision in terms of an ambiguous combination of
these approaches seem to me to be closest to the essence of Crane's art,
an ironic vision which can be resolved only in terms of contradictions
and paradox. Human nature is characterized by pretentiousness and narrow-
ness, and man's existence is affected even by seemingly uncontroliable

factors such as chance, as we see in "The Blue Hotel"; but clearly men have the possibility of controlling their destinies at least in part. In assessing the two approaches, Gibson frames a question which, as we have noted, is central to The Red Badge of Courage: "is courage untempered by discretion meaningful?" (396). In The Red Badge the men were bestial and barbarian when possessed by blind and irrational "courage." The Swede even more vividly displays the meaninglessness of blind courage. Yet the Easterner shows a lack of responsibility in his discretion. As in the novel, ambiguity lies at the centre of things.

An enticing question which must be mentioned, if not resolved, concerns the element of tragedy in "The Blue Hotel." I have already referred to the view in which the Easterner attains a profound feeling of pity and horror, thus achieving a tragic insight into the situation. While there is a suggestion of this, the overall effect of "The Blue Hotel" refutes the facile resolution of the Easterner. Walcutt, who has been accused of reading the story deterministically, nevertheless comes close to expressing the ambiguity which lies at the root of it:

The characters have volition and ethical judgement--they are not driven by overwhelming forces--and they use these powers everywhere in the story . . . . Yet their "choices" entangle them in nets of circumstances from which they cannot be extricated. The conventional notion of a moral order presided over by the forms of public morality is made indefensibly ludicrous by the action. Everybody in this story is conscious, has ideas about fairness and decency which are with him constantly, and tries to act in a way that he can justify. But the outcome is beyond anyone's control, and the social verdict of the gambler's conviction is a gross fraud.
    It is the whole cosmic scheme that is out of key with man's notions of what properly should happen.[7]

And in this confrontation of the chaotic cosmos and man's desires for order lies the absurd. Crane, however, is exploring and giving expression to

his vision, not conforming to a given philosophical attitude. The ironic

nature of his vision expresses ambiguity and contradiction. As well as the

emphasis on the chaos of the universe and on man's imperfections, there is

in Crane an implicit valuing of man's abilities to will, to reason, to love,

to be humble, to be aware. But these qualities are rarely to be seen in

"The Blue Hotel."

I have avoided a specific discussion of technique with respect to

"The Blue Hotel." The first and second chapters have focussed particularly

on Crane's impressionism and the purpose of this chapter is to probe more

deeply into the nature of Crane's irony. Technique is still, of course,

the major element in Crane's fiction. Only through the vivid language,

carefully controlled action, and subtle use of point of view could "The

Blue Hotel" achieve the effects that have been considered here. Of chief

importance in the technical achievement of this story is the use of the

natural environment in the broadly symbolic way that the setting is used

in "The Open Boat." As we have noted, the blue hotel itself suggests both

isolation and pretentiousness, key themes in the story. As well, the storm

which creates a frigid, swirling desert around the hotel effectively

heightens our impression of a chaotic and disordered universe. Both the

blue and the cold mirror the irrational fear of the Swede and the "profound

chill" of the Easterner. Therefore while the overall situation is symboli-

cally similar to that of "The Open Boat"--a group of individuals exposed

to the chaos of the universe and to human nature in its essential charac-

teristics--the language still functions impressionistically, to present the

author's vision vividly and dynamically. The animal and machine imagery,

particularly noticeable during the fight, are reminiscent of The Red Badge

of Courage. The ability to find the apt phrase in order to give both a

visual impression as well as a subtle undertone of meaning is typical of

Crane's impressionism at its best: "In his eyes was the dying-swan look.

Through the windows could be seen the snow turning blue in the shadow of

dusk. The wind tore at the house, and some loose thing beat regularly

against the clapboards like a spirit tapping" (99-100); or during the argu-

ment over the card-game, when "the whole company of cards was scattered

on the floor, where the boots of the men trampled the fat and painted kings

and queens as they gazed with their silly eyes at the war that was waging

above them" (113); or the great description of the journey outside for the

fight:

The men lowered their heads and plunged into the tempest as into a sea. . . ;
great whirls and clouds of flakes, swept up from the ground by the frantic
winds, were streaming southward with the speed of bullets. The covered land
was blue with the sheen of an unearthly satin, and there was no other hue
save for where, at the low, black railway station--which seemed incredibly
distant--one light gleamed like a tiny jewel. (115)

Crane is a master impressionist and his total effect depends heavily on this.

iii

Before we turn in conclusion to "The Open Boat," a much-neglected

but important work demands mention, even if there is only space enough to

make preliminary suggestions. The Monster is a novelette which deserves

a chapter to itself, but may be brought in in a brief way here because it

explores the social aspect of the questions which have been raised in this

chapter; that is, questions involving individual isolation, individual and

social conventions or codes, and the conflict between appearance and reality.

Ultimately, it seems to me, this story comments on the absurdity of trying

to reconcile social values and individual moral awareness. The central

irony resides in the question: "Who is the Monster?" (the faceless negro

or society), and a central paradox which forms a pattern for the whole is

expressed in the problem of individual sincerity in a corrupt and hypo-

critical environment. James Hafley expresses this paradox in terms of

"saving face": "Henry and the others who lose face in the story ultimately

save face and those who try to save face, however sympathetic one must

sometimes be with their problems, finally lose face in the light of Henry's

significance."[8] Thus The Monster is typical of Crane, for the conflicts

and contradictions which dominate all his works are represented here in a

social context.

In his article, "The Symbolic Unity of 'The Monster,'" Thomas

Gullason offers some valuable suggestions about Crane's method of composi-

tion in this story. He points out that in an overall way The Monster follows

a pattern of cause and effect, the first nine chapters presenting in vivid

detail the action leading up to and surrounding the accident and the re-

maining fifteen exploring the individual and social consequences of the

situation. Of more importance, though, is the method Crane uses to move

through the action. Gullason mentions that each chapter is presented as

a dramatic scene, sometimes focussing on the individual, sometimes on the

community. This technique of selective detail is used to build up to the

climax of Chapters VII, VIII, and IX where there is a culmination of des-

cription and emotional excitement. Then the rest of The Monster is concerned

with exposing the real monster, society (collectively and individually),

and allowing the irony to permeate ever more deeply as Trescott is finally

ostracized. Although Gullason does not speak of Crane's impressionism, it

should be apparent that the technique at work in <u>The Monster</u> is decidedly

impressionistic, in the selective focussing on details, in the imaginative

and descriptive language, and in the ironic juxtaposition of incidents,

always from a detached point of view. A rhythm is developed by the alter-

nating focus, particularly in the shift back and forth from individuals

to the community. A similar rhythm develops in "The Open Boat" in the

alternating moods of hope and despair; in part the rhythmic movement grows

out of the impressionist technique.

  <u>The Monster</u> is remarkable above all for its meticulous control,
control of language, mood, and action. Crane's style here displays the
maturity and subtlety which distinguish his best works. The superbly-
managed crescendo which leads up to the fire in Dr. Trescott's house, for
example, shows the careful control which Crane is exercising. In the first
chapter we meet Dr. Trescott and his son, Jimmie, whom Henry Johnson will
rescue from the burning house. Then we meet Henry, the doctor's negro
hostler, and in the exchange between Henry and Jimmie and in their reference
to Dr. Trescott we see the sympathy and light good humor with which Crane
has drawn these three characters. Having thus introduced the main charac-
ters and casually shown the ordinariness of the town, Crane begins the
gradual build-up of excitement. First we learn of the fire and follow the
firemen in their preparations. Then, at Trescott's house, a "wisp of smoke
came from one of the windows at the end of the house and drifted quietly
into the branches of a cherry tree." Then after a moment "the window
brightened as if the four panes of it had been stained with blood," and
suddenly "the panes of the red window tinkled and crashed to the ground,
and at other windows there suddenly reared other flames, like bloody

spectres at the apertures of a haunted house" (III, 40).

With this violent and ominously prophetic imagery of the fire,

Crane is leading directly into the horrors of Chapter VII where Henry

goes into the burning house to rescue Jimmie. In trying to find a way

back out, he remembers by chance a "little private staircase" which leads

out through a laboratory. Crane's description of Johnson's traumatic

escape reaches surrealistic proportions:

All manner of odours assailed him during this flight. They seemed to be
alive with envy, hatred, and malice. At the entrance to the laboratory
he confronted a strange spectacle. The room was like a garden in the
region where might be burning flowers. Flames of violet, crimson, green,
blue, orange, and purple were blooming everywhere. There was one blaze
that was precisely the hue of a delicate coral . . . . An orange-coloured
flame leaped like a panther at the lavender trousers. This animal bit
deeply into Johnson. There was an explosion at one side, and suddenly
before him there reared a delicate, trembling sapphire shape like a
fairy lady. With a quiet smile she blocked his path and doomed him and
Jimmie.

The bathos of such a phrase as "like a fairy lady" only slightly mars

the overall effect of this passage, but it indicates Crane's occasional

lapse into the faults of the prevailing standards of "fine writing." But

the climactic image of the overturned acid on the desktop is unforgettable:

Suddenly the glass splintered, and a ruby-red snakelike thing
poured its thick length out upon the top of the old desk. It coiled and
hesitated, and then began to swim a languorous way down the mahogany slant.
At the angle it waved its sizzling molten head to and fro over the closed
eyes of the man beneath it. Then, in a moment, with a mystic impulse, it
moved again, and the red snake flowed directly down into Johnson's upturned
face. (45, 46)

In the surrealistic fantasy of the imagery in this passage, Crane's impres-

sionism is moving towards the expressionism of this century which deliberately

distorts external reality in order to express a chaotic and grotesque world,

or in order to present a psychologically-distorted subjective vision.

Crane's use of such imagery beautifully objectifies the horror of Johnson's

experience and symbolically suggests the "envy, hatred, and malice" which

define society.

The second major section ruthlessly exposes that society, but

Crane's technical control keeps the satire subdued and therefore all the

more powerful. The casual tone throughout and the vivid accuracy of his

depiction of a typical small town and its ordinary inhabitants make the

irony extremely forceful. Through this detached observation of an unusual

situation in an ordinary town, we see Dr. Trescott becoming increasingly

isolated. The impossibility of his attempts to reconcile his moral position

with the pretentious and hypocritical values of the community becomes

evident. The central paradoxes of the novelette appear as the judge, the

citadel of justice and rational thought, supports the view of the public

that Trescott has made a mistake in saving the faceless monster, Henry

Johnson. At dinner one evening

the judge said, suddenly, "Trescott, do you think it is--" As Trescott
paused expectantly, the judge fingered his knife. He said, thoughtfully,
"No one wants to advance such ideas, but somehow I think that that poor
fellow ought to die."
There was in Trescott's face at once a look of recognition, as
if in this tangent of the judge he saw an old problem. (55)

And so Crane continues, showing now individuals, now the community, as

the doctor is progressively ostracized for his humanitarian charity by the

"Christian" people of the town.

Crane in The Monster, then, turns more directly to social criticism,

exploring the motives of hypocritical individuals and the power of mass

opinion. In the early Maggie, social criticism is surely part of Crane's

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concern, but in <u>The Monster</u> he reaches levels of control and polish

(particularly in such matters as dialogue and irony) which reveal a

definite maturity in his art. In the general theme of isolation, of

ostracism, <u>The Monster</u> represents an aspect of a central Crane concern,

the problems of individual awareness in an indifferent and incomprehen-

sible environment. In this case the chaotic and irrational world is not

cosmic; it is found in the contradictory and hypocritical attitudes of

the social community. But the absurd effect is achieved. The doctor's

situation becomes one of cosmic irony: an irresolvable conflict between

personal courage and hostility. And the absurd effect is expressed.

Wednesday, the day Mrs. Trescott receives visitors, produced but one out

of fifteen. A low table "was burdened with many small cups and plates of

uncut tea-cake."

Glancing down at the cups, Trescott mechanically counted them. There were
fifteen of them. "There, there," he said. "Don't cry, Grace. Don't cry."
        The wind was whining round the house, and the snow beat aslant
upon the windows. Sometimes the coal in the stove settled with a crumb-
ling sound, and the four panes of mica flashed a sudden new crimson. As
he sat holding her head on his shoulder, Trescott found himself occasionally
trying to count the cups. There were fifteen of them. (101, 102)

IV

CONCLUSION: "THE OPEN BOAT"

Having considered the French Impressionists and Garland, Conrad, James, the awkward _Maggie_ and the brilliant technical achievement of _The Red Badge of Courage_, the intense ironic vision of the mature stories, I wish to move now to the most fully controlled expression of Crane's impressionism and irony, "The Open Boat." Though it is an earlier work than those of the preceding chapter, "The Open Boat" nevertheless provides a focus with which to conclude, for the pattern which has been established in this thesis may properly find its culmination in the achievement of this story. I have examined the impressionistic nature of Crane's technique and the irony which is fundamental to his poetic vision. These have been focussed on in some detail separately, but a basic premise of the thesis is that both function inextricably in the total achievement of Crane's art. "The Open Boat" is a superb example of that overall technical achievement.

Chapter I provides the beginning for a gradual movement from impressionism itself to the ironic view which characterizes Crane's fiction and, as I see it, grows organically out of the impressionistic technique. This movement is represented in part in Chapter II, in which a consideration of language and structure leads directly into theme and irony, and is a logical pattern with which to conclude the thesis. In examining "The Open Boat" I wish to follow the movement from technique to meaning, but by starting from a discussion of structure and point of view and moving through

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language towards theme and meaning. In this way we may more readily grasp the key elements of the story's achievement at the outset. All the elements of technique--the manipulation of point of view, the selection of significant detail, the subtle contrasts of image and mood, the contrasts in prose style--function in the pattern of contradictions which gives "The Open Boat" its structure and meaning: the juxtaposition of contrasts throughout creates the ironic tensions which are central to the experience, it allows the author to comment on the limited viewpoints and resulting attitudes of the characters, and it heightens the overall effect of a contradictory and indifferent universe. And as impressionism characterizes all the chief elements in "The Open Boat," so it will be seen to characterize the key elements of fiction itself: subject matter, point of view, characterization, tone, language, setting, symbol, and ultimately, theme.

The pattern of contrasts which defines the movement of "The Open Boat" is noticeable in an overall way in the structure of the action. Indeed, in the alternation of moods of hope and despair by which the story progresses one is aware of a wavelike movement which provides a sense of rhythm. Adding to the stylistic achievement of the story is the rhythmic effect of the prose itself, which I shall consider later. Impressionism is operating at this structural level also, for Crane manages to present the contrasting emotional moods in a detached and objective fashion, nakedly exposing the attitudes of the men as he exposes Henry Fleming in The Red Badge. After the first two sections of "The Open Boat," in which the setting is established and the uneasy suspense of the characters is accentuated, Sections III and IV trace both the build-up of hope and cheery optimism as the men anticipate help from a life-saving station, and the

progressive disappointment and despair as their hopes are dashed. In a mood

of "quiet cheerfulness," hoping to be ashore in about an hour, the four,

having found cigars and matches, "rode impudently in their little boat and,

with an assurance of an impending rescue shining in their eyes, puffed at

the big cigars, and judged well and ill of all men. Everyboy took a drink

of water" (XII, 39). But four times the puzzled phrase is ventured: "'Funny

they haven't seen us,'" as they wait in vain for signs of life in the light-

house. Hope again flourishes as a man on shore is sighted, and then a

hotel omnibus full of people, but the irony of their absurd position so

near and yet so far from shore is made apparent as they are assumed to be

fishermen. Despair again dominates their mood as dusk falls and further

isolates them from land and safety.

        This pattern of alternating moods recedes as the point of view

becomes more wholly that of the correspondent. The last three sections

trace the thoughts of the correspondent as he becomes increasingly conscious

of his isolation and of the indifference of the universe to man's plight.

Again Crane allows a degree of detachment, but we see things primarily

through the correspondent's eyes and thus are led to share in his final

insight. Whether his convictions constitute the ultimate meaning of the

story must be determined by the cumulative effect of the contradictions and

ironies, and the degree to which the correspondent's point of view can

be regarded as the narrator's.

        Point of view, therefore, is an extremely important element in

"The Open Boat." It is a prime feature of the impressionistic technique

and is a key to the irony and thus the ultimate meaning. The famous

opening sentences of the story are highly significant in establishing both

the point of view of the men in the boat and the general atmosphere:

> None of them knew the colour of the sky. Their eyes glanced level, and were fastened upon the waves that swept towards them. These waves were of the hue of slate, save for the tops, which were of foaming white, and all of the men knew the colours of the sea. The horizon narrowed and widened, and dipped and rose, and at all times its edge was jagged with waves that seemed thrust up in points like rocks. (29)

To leave the splendid language effects--rhythm and imagery--aside for the moment, this passage compactly and irrevocably impresses us with the intense and restricted position of the four men. Their attention is riveted on the job at hand, to stay afloat, and nothing beyond the level sweep of the waves comes into their scope of vision. But abruptly and immediately Crane hints at another perspective: "Many a man ought to have a bathtub larger than the boat which here rode upon the sea." After this ironic reference to domesticity which breaks, for a moment, the intensity of the scene, we return to the closeted environment of the boat, meet the four men, and again view with close-up detail the tremendously restricted position of the small boat on an angry sea:

> A singular disadvantage of the sea lies in the fact that, after success-fully surmounting one wave, you discover that there is another behind it just as important and just as nervously anxious to do something effective in the way of swamping boats . . . . As each slaty wall of water approached, it shut all else from the view of the men in the boat . . . . (30-31)

Again after emphasizing the point of view of the men in the boat, Crane shifts the perspective, this time drawing us back up from the boat for an overview. "Viewed from a balcony, the whole thing would doubtless have been weirdly picturesque." This type of ironic contrast, achieved impres-sionistically through point of view or imagery, is a central tool of Crane's technique, for it enables him both to demonstrate the limited nature of

any one perspective of reality and also to create an impression of the contra-
dictory and absurdly irreconcilable nature of reality in toto. This is why
point of view is so important in Crane, for any one perspective, because
of the irony, is almost always ambiguous.

This becomes more clear if we continue to look at point of view for
a moment, observing Crane's treatment of the four characters and particularly
the correspondent. Characteristically Crane portrays the characters by a
number of selective details, only enough to distinguish the four so that
they function thematically. Thus the captain is a calm and perceptive man,
appearing always to be awake and conscious of the turn of events. The cook
is the least perceptive, displaying premature hopes and a lack of self-
control, but the oiler is perhaps the strongest, quiet and reliable and
showing a good deal of common sense. The correspondent, analytical and
somewhat cynical, is presented from the inside to a greater degree than
any of the others and his point of view is most apparent. As in all his
work, of course, Crane's impersonal characterization adds a degree of
universality. This focusses our attention on the situation in its essential
elements, and the characters are clearly representative figures of the
human condition.

Although from the various snatches of dialogue we learn something
about the individuals in the ten-foot dinghy, the dominant points of view
in the story are the narrator's, the correspondent's, and a group point
of view from the boat. Furthermore, Crane seems to take care that the
correspondent himself speaks for all the men, thus reinforcing the theme
of brotherhood and unity. The early mention of "the subtle brotherhood
of men," for example, stresses that all the men felt it. "No one mentioned

it. But it dwelt in the boat, and each man felt it warm him." (36) Later,
during the correspondent's lonely night of rowing, his musings are linked
with the other men: "The men in the dinghy had not discussed these matters,
but each had, no doubt, reflected upon them in silence and according to
his mind" (52). Crane's objective technique sometimes presents the group
point of view, sometimes the correspondent's, as we shall see, but also
sometimes an omniscient view which allows various effects of irony. Frequently
the narrator's comments reflect the outlook of the men in the boat, or
they may reflect Crane's own view. But one must exercise care in trying
to ascertain Crane's attitudes. The correspondent eventually comes to see
the natural environment as indifferent, but near the beginning of the story
the narrator describes the waves as "most wrongfully and barbarously abrupt
and tall" (29). Such judgemental phrases from the narrator can only be
seen as ironical in the light of the whole story.[1] Crane is using point
of view to suggest the limited and changing attitudes of the men, and also
to provide a detached omniscient comment at the same time, as when the
men wait in vain for assistance: "It is fair to say here that there was
not a life-saving station within twenty miles in either direction; but the
men did not know this fact, and in consequence they made dark and oppro-
brious remarks concerning the eyesight of the nation's life-savers" (40).
As in the "bath-tub" reference at the beginning of the story, the narrator's
irony provides a continuous comment on the experience, maintaining the
sense of ironic scrutiny.

    The correspondent's point of view becomes increasingly dominant
as the story progresses; the final two sections are seen almost entirely
through his eyes, though the third-person narrative is maintained. Our

attention shifts gradually to the correspondent's consciousness during his lonely vigil through the night. With all the others apparently dozing, "the correspondent thought that he was the one man afloat on all the oceans" (49-50). A subtle mixture of point of view occurs in Section VI, as Crane appears to be mingling the narrator's objective comments with the correspondent's growing awareness of the meaning of his experience. For the third time the chorus-like phrase beginning "'If I am going to be drowned . . .'" is reiterated. The first time this passage is introduced the narrator makes no attempt to disguise the fact that he is formulating it to reflect the attitude of the men: "As for the reflections of the men, there was a great deal of rage in them. Perchance they might be formulated thus: 'If I am going to be drowned . . .'" (40-41). Now, however, as also occurs the second time, this phrase is slipped in unobtrusively so that it might very well come from the correspondent himself. Then we find: "For it was certainly an abominable justice to drown a man who had worked so hard, so hard. The man felt it would be a crime most unnatural. Other people had drowned at sea since galleys swarmed with painted sails, but still--" (51). In the shift to the correspondent's thoughts which is taking place here, we have a deeper and more sympathetic sense of his experience (as well as a fuller insight into man's limitations). This continues to the end of the story and the futile display about "no bricks and no temples," the recollection of the dying soldier in Algiers, the growing sense of nature's indifference in the "high cold star" (51) and the "tall wind-tower" (55), are all communicated to us from the correspondent's consciousness.

By this progressive centring of the point of view in the corres-

pondent and by our increasing identification with him, we are prepared to accept his conclusions about the indifference of nature which comes in the last section. Moreover, by constantly holding to an omniscient narration Crane maintains a degree of objectivity so that the correspondent's experience assumes a level of universal meaning. The final sentence, again from the narrator's point of view, grows naturally out of the correspondent's awareness and offers a sense of resolution--"they felt that they could then be interpreters" (61). But although there is this resolution (the physical conflict has been resolved), Crane's final attitude towards the experience seems still to be ambivalent, for although the men have achieved a new awareness which allows them to interpret their experience, what meaning can be found in an experience of such contradictions and ironies? The contrasts in point of view contribute, along with all the other elements of technique, to the final mystery of the experience.

An important question in "The Open Boat" and one which relates to point of view is that of "tone," the author's relation to his work and, perhaps, to his audience. We noticed that tone is perhaps a significant indication of Crane's attitude at the end of The Red Badge of Courage. Similarly, the tone is responsible for much of the overall effectiveness of stories like "The Blue Hotel" and "The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky." In the case of a detached and objective writer like Crane, however, the tone is often a particularly subtle quality to determine. The tone of his fiction is almost always ironic, of course, but variations within this may range from sardonic bitterness to sympathetic humor.

The narrator's point of view may be an indication of the author's tone, but subtle phrases and unusual twists are further clues to his

attitudes. Thus in "The Open Boat" the overall atmosphere seems to be one of sympathy with the plight of the men, and this is particularly evident in the predominance of the correspondent's point of view in the latter stages of the story, but Crane's detachment and ironic scrutiny of the men also add to the general tone of the story. The ambiguous and contradictory elements in "The Open Boat" in themselves contribute to the tone and help to define Crane's ironic view. Therefore the tone in part develops from ironic twists which reveal other perspectives than the particular limited ones being presented. The tone is one of sympathy when we view the experience from within the boat, or from within the correspondent's mind, but the irony asserts itself when we see the episode as from a balcony or in terms of bathtubs. Both point of view and subtle phrases help to reveal the author's attitude, one which seems to imply at once sympathy and affirmation of brotherhood, and a realization of the ironic contradictions which define man's existence in a vast and indifferent cosmos.

A more detailed treatment of Crane's attitude as it is expressed in "The Open Boat" will come, but first an important final area of Crane's impressionist technique must be discussed, that of language and style. Color images, as I pointed out with The Red Badge of Courage, are a vital part of Crane's impressionism, and "The Open Boat" makes effective use of color, both descriptively and metaphorically. Focussing on the sea from the restricted vision of the men in the boat, Crane describes the effect of the sun-rise:

The sun swung steadily up the sky, and they knew it was broad day because the colour of the sea changed from slate to emerald green streaked with amber lights, and the foam was like tumbling snow. The process of the breaking day was unknown to them. They were aware only of this effect upon the colour of the waves that rolled towards them. (31)

But of more significance to the overall effect of the story is
the remarkable absence of color, or rather, the preponderance of greys.
Reflecting the visual impression as well as, metaphorically, the desperate
state of mind of the four men, the color grey dominates throughout. In
the matter of images as well as in other characteristics of the story,
Crane's achievement, in contrast to The Red Badge, is one of subdued control
and effect by understatement. H. G. Wells recognizes Crane's sense of
discipline in "The Open Boat":

It has all the stark power of the earlier stories, with a new element of
restraint; the color is as full and strong as ever, fuller and stronger,
indeed; but those chromatic splashes that at times deafen and confuse in
the Red Badge, those images that astonish rather than enlighten, are
disciplined and controlled.[2]

An economy and terseness mark Crane's style: "In the wan light the faces
of the men must have been grey" (31).   "Grey-faced and bowed forward, they
mechanically, turn by turn, plied the leaden oars." (46) Here are mirrored
the monotony and despair which at times grasp the men.

Other than grey, the stark opposites of black and white are the
only colors employed frequently. And often in their juxtaposition we
sense the stark and essential nature of the conflict being waged in this
ten-foot dinghy: "Even as the lighthouse was an upright shadow on the
sky, this land seemed but a long black shadow on the sea. It certainly
was thinner than paper" (37); or "The roar of the surf was plain, and
sometimes they could see the white lip of a wave as it spun up the beach.
A tiny house was blocked out against the sky" (39); or "On the distant
dunes were set many little black cottages, and a tall white windmill
reared above them" (55).

Not only does this contrast of black and white accentuate the pattern of contrasts which, as we are discovering, define both the structure and meaning of "The Open Boat," but white itself is used ambiguously by Crane to add to the ironic pattern. Black is used conveniently to suggest gloom and danger, as in the "black bead-like eyes" of the gulls and the "black waters" through which the shark furrows, and white is used frequently to image the destructive power of the sea: "These waves were of the hue of slate, save for the tops, which were of foaming white . . ." (29); "Occasionally a great spread of water, like white flames, swarmed into her" (35); "The tumbling, boiling flood of white water caught the boat and whirled it almost perpendicular" (57). But white, in ironic contrast, also represents all that is safe and sacred to the men. Just as the land itself is an ambiguous object of contemplation for the men because the nearer they go to the shore, the more dangerous is the surf, the white rollers on the shore proclaim at once safety and crushing death. The contrast is expressed as, tossed and wrenched by the "monstrous inshore rollers," the men catch a glimpse of "the white sheets of water scudding up the slanted beach" (56). This is the beach which the correspondent sees shortly, "with its white slope of sand and its green bluff topped with little silent cottages . . . spread like a picture before him" (59). And too, the man who is seen running and undressing must shine with a white glow: "He was naked--naked as a tree in winter; but a halo was about his head, and he shone like a saint" (61). Thus through the color imagery Crane reinforces the story's pattern of ironic contrasts.

Other images than color are used by Crane to achieve the technical effect of "The Open Boat." Most notable, perhaps, are the descrip-

tions of the dinghy as a "bucking broncho": "after scornfully bumping a crest, she would slide and race and splash down a long incline, and arrive bobbing and nodding in front of the next menace" (30); or the images of the sea itself: "There was a terrible grace in the move of the waves, and they came in silence, save for the snarling of the crests" (31). The animal imagery heightens the effects of violence and even hostility in the descriptions of the sea, and the constant references to the little boat as a gallant horse or a tiny thing "at the mercy of five oceans" (35) emphasize the conflict between the two animal forces as well as the sympathetic identification with the boat. Crane's impressionistic imagination vividly captures and portrays the realistic details of the experience.

A subtler and more distinctive characteristic of Crane's language is his great facility for finding phrases which both accurately pinpoint the situation and reverberate symbolically within the meaning of the whole story. Such an image might be the stove which hums "with godlike violence" in "The Blue Hotel." The focussing on selective details is an instrumental means by which Crane achieves his ironic and symbolic effects in "The Open Boat." We notice, for example, the foreshadowing effect of the oiler's thin little oar which "seemed often ready to snap" (29); the omen of the gulls, "gruesome and ominous" in the men's point of view (34); the "brown mats of seaweed" which remind them and us of the ironic proximity of shore (34); the long black line of the land against the sea, a line which seems "thinner than paper" (37); the two lights on the horizon which are "the furniture of the world" (48); the omen of the shark, a knife-like trail of evil through the water which nevertheless is worthy of admiration for its speed and power; the "high cold star" and the wind-tower symbolizing

to the correspondent the vast indifference of the universe. This kind of

detail, so important both for the imaginative impression of the experience

and for the overtones of meaning, is crucial in "The Open Boat" because so

much of its effect comes from the power of understatement, from the subtle

mixture of impressionistic description, symbolic expansion, and ironic

contrast.

Related to this matter of selective details and also to the author's

tone are the various images which reflect the insignificance of man in a

huge and unconcerned universe. The little boat itself, of course, is a

prime example of this helplessness. Furthermore, the lighthouse when first

spotted is simply a "small, still thing on the edge of the swaying horizon.

It was precisely like the point of a pin. It took an anxious eye to find

a lighthouse so tiny" (35). The lights of a city are sighted, but again

man's achievement is dwarfed by nature's magnitude: "Far ahead, where

coast-line, sea, and sky formed their mighty angle, there were little dots

which seemed to indicate a city on the shore" (42). Observations such as

these emphasize the moods of isolation and helplessness. Other details

ironically comment on the situation at hand, as when the gulls sit "comfor-

tably in groups," no more bothered by the sea than "a covey of prairie

chickens a thousand miles inland" (33), and when the correspondent is

temporarily stymied by a current during his swim to shore, but sees the

others slowly making their way nearer, followed by "the water-jar, bouncing

gaily over the seas" (59).

Before discussing the function of Crane's imagery and selective

details in the larger symbolic patterns of the story, I would like to

consider briefly some specific stylistic characteristics. When we speak

of the polish and control of "The Open Boat," we refer chiefly to the style,
to Crane's achievement of understatement, his juxtaposition of types of
phrasing ("poetic" and terse), and his sense of rhythm. The ironic under-
statement which marks "The Open Boat" is partly a result of the objective
and detached narration, the twists of phrase which maintain an ironic
scrutiny of the experience. The terseness of style also contributes to
this overall effect, adding to the sense of immediacy and intensity. This,
as we have seen, is part of impressionism: the facility for presenting the
action or the scene with a directness and vigor which give it an immediate
and momentary intensity, and the achievement of this by selective phrases
and images.

Throughout "The Open Boat" we find a terseness and economy which
convey the tense excitement of the situation. A colloquial and straight-
forward narrative forms the basis of much of the story, and this casual
tone, not without its ironic comments in places, contributes to the detach-
ment and understatement of the whole. In contrast to this terse, colloquial
rhetoric are the rhythmic and poetic phrases which heighten the story's
style, phrases like that describing the shark: "There was a long, loud
swishing astern of the boat, and a gleaming trail of phosphorescence, like
blue flame, was furrowed on the black waters" (51); or the opening para-
graph itself which, as Colvert points out, is a rhythmically balanced
passage which illustrates how Crane puts language to poetic uses. The first
sentence, "None of them knew the colour of the sky," is balanced by
the phrase, "and all of the men knew the colours of the sea."

Coming in the middle of the paragraph, this gives the paragraph something
of the balance and design of a stanza of poetry, a subtle commitment
carried out in the deliberate onomatopoeia of the last sentence, which

imitates the movement of the waves in the first half and suggests in the buzzing, sibilant sounds and broken rhythms of the last part the cruel threat of the imagined rocks:

> The horizon narrowed and widened
> and dipped and rose,
> and at all times its edge was jagged with waves
> that seemed thrust up in points like rocks.[3]

Crane's style also mirrors the moods of the men, as monotony and despair are reflected in the rhythm of the following sentences:

In the meantime the oiler and the correspondent rowed; and also they rowed. They sat together in the same seat, and each rowed an oar. Then the oiler took both oars; then the correspondent took both oars; then the oiler; then the correspondent. They rowed and they rowed. (34)

Clearly the technical achievement of "The Open Boat" is largely dependent upon the craftsmanship of style which is everywhere apparent--in the imagery, the details, the narrative comments, the rhythm, the ironic contrasts of all kinds. The basis of this style is impressionism: the power of selection, a sense for the tacit, the vivid accuracy of phrase, the detached and ironic presentation.

As we move now towards an analysis of the thematic richness of "The Open Boat," towards a consideration of its meaning, we must observe the function of the setting and other basic symbolic devices. The setting is extremely important in "The Open Boat," as it is in much of Crane's fiction. The "open boat situation" is obviously a ready means of isolating man and placing him at the mercy of a vast and possibly antagonistic natural world. Thus, as Conrad suggests, "The Open Boat" rapidly communicates a significance which expands to universal proportions, for it is a story which

by the deep and simple humanity of presentation seems somehow to illustrate
the essentials of life itself, like a symbolic tale. It opens with a phrase
that anybody could have uttered, but which, in relation to what is to follow,
acquires the poignancy of a meaning almost universal.[4]

Much of this meaning, of course, is communicated by the correspondent's

thoughts as he sees progressively deeper into the significance of his

experience, but the source of the whole event lies in the basic microcosmic

situation of four men alone against a natural antagonist. Just what the

nature of that antagonist is becomes an important question in terms of the

story's ultimate meaning.

        In his article on "The Open Boat," Mordecai Marcus suggests that

three views of nature are apparent in the story: the first, that nature is

hostile, malevolent, and threatening--the feeling of the men at the begin-

ning as they battle the "snarling crests" of the waves; the second, that

nature appears to be playfully and thoughtlessly cruel, tantalizing them

with the hope of safety and prompting the thoughts, "If I am going to

be drowned . . ."; and finally, the correspondent's comprehension of

nature as "flatly indifferent" as he contemplates the "bricks and temple,"

the high cold star, and the tall wind-tower.[5] While this sort of movement

is apparent in "The Open Boat," the overwhelming impression is of the

irreconcilable contradictions in the universe and the limited perceptions

of the men in the boat. The changing view of nature throughout and the

ironic contradictions (culminating in the death of the oiler) which

dominate the story give an overall impression of man's limitations and

reliance upon chance and of the unpredictable nature of the universe.

Colvert again makes a perceptive comment, emphasizing that the pattern

of ironic contrasts which we have seen to be crucial in "The Open Boat"

suggests a theme so central to Crane's consciousness that it can be taken as almost a definition of his world-view, the vision of life governed by his profound sense of the consequences of our faulty perceptions of reality. The grand subject of his fiction is man's struggle to bring into some sort of meaningful order the confusions and contradictions of experience.[6]

And this struggle to order what is contradictory and without order lies at the heart of "the absurd."

If the external environment represented in "The Open Boat" is "flatly indifferent," a vast universe unconcerned about the plight of man, what other characteristics of absurdity do we find in this story? As in most of Crane's fiction, the obverse of this environment of vast indifference is puny and insignificant man distinguished by his pride, hopes, and illusions. While this is underkeyed in "The Open Boat," unlike "The Blue Hotel," man is nevertheless examined in his absurd characteristics. The cook in particular shows a tendency to fall back on illusory hopes, as in the silly argument about the house of refuge near the lighthouse, or his dreamy desires for pie and ham sandwiches. And all four appear foolishly optimistic as they puff on cigars and wait to be rescued. The absurd insignificance of man is revealed by the narrator in expressing the feelings of the men during one of their moods of frustration: Fate, "'this old ninny-woman,'"

"is an old hen who knows not her intention. If she had decided to drown me, why did she not do it in the beginning and save me all this trouble? The whole affair is absurd. --But no; she cannot mean to drown me. She dare not drown me. She cannot drown me. Not after all this work!" Afterward the man might have had an impulse to shake his fist at the clouds. "Just you drown me, now, and then hear what I call you!" (41)

Crane's irony here is directed not against the "cruelty" and "malice" of nature, but against the absurd hopes and illusions of man.

But through the figure of the correspondent we move closer to Crane's attitude towards man. A major pattern in "The Open Boat" is the growing awareness which takes place in the correspondent and the progressive centring of point of view in him, as we have seen, to present his consciousness. At the beginning of the story Crane prepares us for the reflective nature of the correspondent, for, rowing beside the oiler, he "watched the waves and wondered why he was there" (30). His cynical assurance also becomes apparent early in the story, but not until his solitary turn at the oars that night do we begin to sense his deepening comprehension of the experience. With the others apparently asleep and the shark circling around, he is brought face to face with his own utter isolation and the absurdity of his existence:

> When it occurs to a man that nature does not regard him as important, and that she feels she would not maim the universe by disposing of him, he at first wishes to throw bricks at the temple, and he hates deeply the fact that there are no bricks and no temples. Any visible expression of nature would surely be pelleted with his jeers.
> Then, if he feels no tangible thing to boot, he feels, perhaps, the desire to confront a personification and indulge in pleas, bowed to one knee, and with hands supplicant, saying, "Yes, but I love myself."
> A high cold star on a winter's night is the word he feels that she says to him. Thereafter he knows the pathos of his situation. (51)

Here the total indifference of nature is being registered in the correspondent's mind, and here also we see his absurd response as he first contemplates rebellion and then asserts his own importance, if nothing else.

Again these thoughts fill his head as morning dawns and he notes the tall wind-tower rearing above them on the shore:

> This tower was a giant, standing with its back to the plight of the ants. It represented in a degree, to the correspondent, the serenity of nature amid the struggles of the individual--nature in the wind, and nature in the

vision of men. She did not seem cruel to him then, nor beneficent, nor
treacherous, nor wise. But she was indifferent, flatly indifferent. (55-56)

Confrontation with this massive unconcern and indifference brings the

correspondent to a position of sudden and new awareness--awareness of the

flaws of his life and a plaintive wish for another chance:

A distinction between right and wrong seems absurdly clear to him, then,
in this new ignorance of the grave-edge, and he understands that if he
were given another opportunity he would mend his conduct and his words
and be better and brighter during an introduction or a tea.

But there is no time for such futile reflections. The boat is nearly

swamped, and he along with the others must rely now upon action, comrade-

ship, and chance to determine their destinies.

Therefore Crane has portrayed an experience which brings a man

face to face with the absurd nature of existence. The correspondent

becomes aware of his own impotence and insignificance; he confronts the

implacable unconcern of a vast and disordered cosmic arena; and further-

more, he fails to escape man's absurd desires, first, to be recognized

as a creature of some significance and importance, and second, to gain a

second chance upon admission of the "innumerable flaws of his life." We

return, then, to a consideration of Crane's attitude: where does he stand

in relation to the experience? Is there an affirmation of values in "The

Open Boat," and if so, what values?

In his recent study of modern fiction, R. W. B. Lewis makes this

revealing comment about "The Open Boat":

The generation of writers prior to that of Camus and Silone--the generation
of Joyce and Mann and Proust--customarily ended its search in the private
and personal city of art, where the artist is the only citizen; but Camus

and his contemporaries have, so to speak, gone back to the age of their grandfathers and have insisted again upon the life of participation in the city of man. That same insistence is part of the design, for example, worked out by Conrad, between the systole of an icy skepticism and the diastole of a faith in human love, in secret sharing. And the entire movement is, I venture, carried by the thirty-page tale of Stephen Crane, "The Open Boat," with its double discovery, first, of the remote indifference of the universal power ("she was indifferent, flatly indifferent") and of the absurdity of life ("the whole affair was absurd"); second, of the one irreducible value remaining--"the subtle brotherhood of men . . . established on the seas."[7]

I have attempted to show how the inpressionistic technique, with its display

of ironical contrasts, expresses the first part of the "double discovery,"

the absurdity of existence; now my concern is to find in conclusion the

affirmation of human sharing which Lewis calls "the one irreducible value

remaining." Crane introduces the subtle brotherhood early in the story

in a beautifully rhythmical passage which impresses us with its sincerity:

It would be difficult to describe the subtle brotherhood of men that was here established on the seas. No one said that it was so. No one mentioned it. But it dwelt in the boat, and each man felt it warm him . . . . There was surely a quality in it that was personal and heart-felt . . . . But no one said that it was so. No one mentioned it. (36)

Crane's emphasis here on the unspoken bond between the men carries a

strong sense of conviction; yet one senses that perhaps this affirmation

is premature. The comradeship has yet to be put to a real test. And this,

perhaps, is what distinguishes the story's last pages, for during the

lonely night and the rough battle prior to the swamping the men have all

become resigned to their situation. They face whatever may come with

resolution and an automatic sense of comradeship. "The correspondent,

observing the others, knew that they were not afraid, but the full meaning

of their glances was shrouded." (57)

That the bond of brotherhood has become fully realized by the end is made apparent by the terse exchanges of "Will you spare me?" and "Sure" between the oiler and the correspondent. The concern of the men for each other during the swim to safety further reinforces the meaning of this brotherhood. But the most graphic illustration of the meaning of this concern for others comes prior to the swamping, in the correspondent's thoughts during his long sojourn at the oars. It is immediately after his chilling recognition of the "pathos of his situation" that he finds himself repeating a verse about a dying soldier in Algiers, and while he previously has felt completely indifferent to the soldier's plight, his own situation now brings home to him the actuality of that soldier's condition--"stern, mournful, and fine." "Now, however, it quaintly came to him as a human, living thing," and he was moved "by a profound and perfectly impersonal comprehension. He was sorry for the soldier of the Legion who lay dying in Algiers" (52-53). Like Lear and like the Ancient Mariner, the correspondent gains an insight into the human condition, and like them also, he moves outside of himself to a feeling of empathy. In this way are affirmed the values of human brotherhood and sympathy, of "secret sharing."

And perhaps this is Crane's attitude, in the final analysis, that in a world which is absurdly without order and concern for man, man must turn within himself for the fight and for the victory, and to the human community for those values which are wholly human. The supreme irony of the oiler's death remains; the oiler who consistently appears strongest and least selfish. But chance is an element of man's world, just as will-power, love, and sympathy are, and true courage is not a matter of heroic stature,

but of intense and sincere <u>humanness</u>. In "War Memories" Crane records

the sublimity of the common man, peering into the faces of those under fire:

There wasn't a high heroic face among them. They were all men intent upon
business. That was all. It may seem to you that I am trying to make
everything a squalor. That would be wrong. I feel that things were often
sublime. But they were differently sublime. They were not of our shallow
and preposterous fictions. They stood out in a simple, majestic common-
place. It was the behavior of men on the street. It was the behavior of
men. In one way, each man was just pegging along at the heels of the man
before him, who was pegging along at the heels of still another man, who
was pegging along at the heels of still another man who-- It was that in
the flat and obvious way. In another way it was pageantry, the pageantry
of the accomplishment of naked duty. One cannot speak of it--the spectacle
of the common man serenely doing his work, his appointed work. It is the
one thing in the universe which makes one fling expression to the winds and
be satisfied to simply feel. (IX, 238)

Is this far removed from "The Open Boat"? On the contrary, it is

an expression of the values which lie at the heart of Stephen Crane, the

affirmation of human nature in spite of its limitations and the valuing

above all of sincerity and responsibility to duty. Max Westbrook asserts

the affirmative nature of Crane's fiction on the basis of three qualities

which we have seen to be implied by Crane: "knowledge of the universe,

acceptance of the universe, and the attempt to live in accord with a code

of courage, honesty, and sympathy."[8] This is not to say that Crane's

fiction is optimistic, for this thesis has been concerned to show that both

the impressionistic technique of Crane and the ironic vision to which it

gives form are directly involved with dramatizing a world absurdly without

order, dominated by pretentiousness, limited awareness, foolish pride, and

hypocrisy. Yet there is something remaining which asserts that man and his

values are worth the contradictions of existence.

The final meaning in Crane's work is simply the cumulative effect

of the experiences represented. And the technique used to represent those experiences is a fundamental part of the aesthetic totality. Inasmuch as the great variety of elements of technique are most fully described by the term "impressionism" and Crane's ultimate thematic patterns and poetic vision express themselves through irony, and because the impressionist technique of Crane is in so many ways a logical vehicle for the expression of irony, this approach would seem to be a means of pressing towards the nucleus of his art.

FOOTNOTES

Introduction

[1]*The American Novel*, 200.

[2]Thrall, *Handbook*, 318.

[3]Ibid., 303.

[4]*The American Novel*, 2.

[5]Especially Stallman, "Stephen Crane: A Revaluation." Professor Stallman has been a key figure in Crane criticism since 1950, and while one may disagree with him, he is too important to overlook. As might be expected, critical disagreement has been frequent and even hostile among Crane scholars; indeed, one can perceive the general formation of two camps: those that see Crane as a symbolist in the American tradition and those that do not. This is obviously a touchy issue and one which in this thesis I propose to avoid, although it will be apparent towards which camp I lean.

[6]*The American Novel*, 233.

[7]"Stephen Crane: A Note," 50.

Chapter I

[1]*Impressionists and Symbolists*, 49.

[2]For an example of this approach see Gammell, *Twilight of Painting*, 84-85.

[3]*Impressionist Painters*, 7.

[4]*Crumbling Idols*, 123.

[5]Gammell, *Twilight of Painting*, 89.

[6]Cheney, *Primer*, 78-79.

[7]Ibid.

[8]*American Literary Naturalism*, 232.

[9]*Proust*, 66.

[10]"The Art of Fiction," 415.

[11]Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 16.

[12]Crane, *The Work of Stephen Crane*, IX, 245-246. All quotations from Crane are taken from the twelve-volume collected edition edited by Wilson Follett. References are to volume and page.

[13]*Roads of Adventure*, 243-244.

[14]*Stephen Crane*, 138.

[15]"Stephen Crane from an English Standpoint," 662.

[16]*The Modern Short Story*, 68.

[17]"Stephen Crane: A Revaluation," 252.

[18]*On Native Grounds*, 71.

Chapter II

[1]Crane, *Work*, X, 138.

[2]"Crane's Maggie: A Reassessment," 252.

[3]*The Poetry of Stephen Crane*, 148.

[4]Crane, *Omnibus*, 680.

[5]Ibid., 673.

[6]*Love Letters to Nellie Crouse*, 43-44.

[7]*Three Great Tales*, 230.

[8]"Crane's Use of Color in *The Red Badge of Courage*," 169.

[9]Cf. "Lyric 95" of Tennyson's *In Memoriam*; also the "Prologue" to Act IV of *Henry V* in which Shakespeare presents an impressionistic description of the night before the Battle of Agincourt. ("Now entertain conjecture of a time . . . .")

[10]Critical controversy has raged over this image, chiefly about the pro's and con's of R. W. Stallman's reading of it as central to the pattern of Christian redemption which he sees in *The Red Badge*. See Cox, Eby, Greenfield, Osborn, Rahv, Stallman . . . .

[11]"A Remarkable Book," 191.

[12]"The Psychic Wound," 82.

[13]The Craft of Fiction, 89-90.

[14]"Naturalism Nascent," 225-226.

[15]"The Red Badge of Courage," 106.

[16]American Literary Naturalism, 81.

[17]"The Unmistakable Stephen Crane," 571-572.

[18]"Introduction" to The Red Badge of Courage, xv.

[19]"Henry Fleming's Tupenny Fury," 272.

Chapter III

[1]"Stephen Crane's Homo Absurdus," 180. Although Professor
Stein's comments on Crane are refreshingly perceptive (a rare occurrence
in which the irony is accorded full significance), he spends very little
time discussing Crane's technique in achieving these effects. This thesis
attempts to reconcile the breach between those who discuss structure and
imagery and those who discuss themes and irony.

[2]The Myth of Sisyphus, 21, 37.

[3]"The Unmistakable Stephen Crane," 564.

[4]"Stephen Crane as Symbolic Naturalist: An Analysis of 'The
Blue Hotel.'"

[5]"'The Blue Hotel' and the Ideal of Human Courage."

[6]Especially Gibson and Greenfield.

[7]American Literary Naturalism, 74.

[8]"'The Monster' and the Art of Stephen Crane," 160.

Chapter IV

[1]As James B. Colvert points out, "to a detached observer ocean
waves are neither right nor wrong, barbarous nor civilized" ("Style and
Meaning," 42). He goes on to stress the important fact that the ironic
view implies an ambivalent view, "for the ironical man, though detached
from the world of contradictions he perceives, does not pass final judge-

ment upon them." Hence the concern with contradictory attitudes and points of view reflects Crane's essential irony.

   [2]"Stephen Crane from an English Standpoint," 666.

   [3]"Style and Meaning," 40.

   [4]"Stephen Crane," 103.

   [5]"The Three-Fold View of Nature in 'The Open Boat.'"

   [6]"Style and Meaning," 40.

   [7]The Picaresque Saint, 92.

   [8]"Stephen Crane: The Pattern of Affirmation," 229.

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